

# - contents -

The Paramount Issue	ъу	Barbara Wright	P 2	
Outpost Zero	ру	Valerie DeVries	P 3	
The Vulcan Palace	by	Barbara Wright	P 44	
Side by Side	ъу	Maria Rebicsek	P 45	
Poem	ру	Lorraine Goodison	P 49	

Illustrations: All artwork by Virginia Lee Smith. Cover Sandy Sapatka

## A ScoTpress Publication

Mitors - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini
Typing - Valerie Piacentini
Proofreading - Valerie Piacentini (Trust Sheila to get out of it!)
Printing - Janet Quarton & James T.
Collating - Sheila's Chain Gang - Frances Abernethy, Lorraine Goodison,
Hilde McCabe, Cory King, Allison Rooney.

Distracting - Shona Stencil Mutilation - Shah

Enterprise - Log Entries 56 is available from

Sheila Clark, 6 Craigmill Cottages Strathmartine by Dundee Scotland.

(C) ScoTpress. All rights are reserved to the writers and artist. Anyone wishing to reprint any of the material herein is asked to obtain permission in writing first. It is understood that this applies only to original material herein, and that no attempt is made to supersede any rights held by Paramount, NEC, BBC, or any other holders of copyright in STAR CREE material.

August, 1983

Hello, and welcome to Enterprise - Log Entries 56.

As this is our first issue since Sol III, we'd like to take this chance to congratulate the Committee on their running of what was, we think, Britain's biggest Star Trek Convention. It was good to see so many of you there, and we hope you enjoyed it as much as we did.

Due to time and circumstance I'm committing the cardinal sin for zine editors, and proof-reading my own stencils this time. I'd thought of offering a prize to whoever spots the most typos, but on reflection my ego wouldn't stand it.

You may notice a change in the paper quality of thisissue. Roneo withdrew the type of paper we normally use, and we had the choice of changing to a more expensive paper - with a consequent increase in the cost of the zines - or to paper of a lesser quality. We opted to hold the price of the zines, since none of us is immune to the financial problems of the day. We hope you will agree that this was the better choice.

We have had letters asking about Variations 7. The story is now finished, we have the artwork, and Sheila is about to begin the stencils; barring accidents, the zine should be ready by September.

If any of you would like advance notice of forthcoming ScoTpress zines, a stamped addressed envelope left with Sheila will bring you our latest flyers. We usually manage to have the zines ready before the announced publication date, so they are in fact often available before the ads appear. U.S. and overseas readers, please send an addressed envelope and 2 IRC's. American readers can, if they wish, send us a U.S. stamp at the first airmail rate, but in that case, please do not fix it to the envelope — we can't use them for outgoing mail, but we can use them if we have to send a SAR to the States.

As things stand at the moment, we hope to be at both Triple C and Midcon; we'll look forward to seeing some of you there.

Peace, Willaric

We have had a spate of children throwing lighted matches into letter boxes around here, and I do know that some of my outgoing mail has been destroyed. If anyone is waiting to hear from me, especially about submissions, would they please accept my apologies, and contact me.

Thank you.

Submission of fiction, poetry and artwork are always welcome for ScoTpress zines, and can be sent to

Sheila Clark 6 Craigmill Cottages Strathmartine by Dundee Scotland DD3 OPF Valerie Piacentini 20 Ardrossan Road Saltooats Ayrshire Scotland KA21 5WW

ScoTpress is collecting used stamps for the Guide Dogs for the Blind. If you have any - even one or two - please send them with your order to Sheila. You might not think your one or two will be much use - but everyone's one or two, added together, make up quite a bagful. U.K. or foreign all acceptable.

## THE PARAMOUNT ISSUE

The Network asked The Executive and The Executive asked The Director -"Could we have some Klingons in The next set of shows?" The Executive asked The Director, The Director Said, "Certainly. I'll go and tell The Producer MoM Just before he goes." The Director He backed away And went and told Gene Roddenb'ry, "Don't forget the Klingons In the next set of shows."

Gene Roddenb'ry
Said sleepily
"You'd better tell
The Chief that
Many people nowadays
Like Romulans
Instead."

The Director
Said, "Fancy,"
And went to
The telephone.
He phoned up the Executive and
Said, with strength of will,
"Excuse me
For honesty
And taking of
The liberty,
But Romulans are nasty and
They're very hard
To kill."

The Executive said
"Oh!"
And went to
The Network Chief.
"Talking of the villains for
The next set of shows,
Many people
Think that
Romulans
Are nastier.
Would you like to try a few
Romulans
Instead?"

The Chief said
"Bother!"
And then he said
"Oh, deary me!"
The Chief sobbed, "Oh, deary me!"
And then he blew his nose.
"Nobody," he whimpered,
"Could call me
A fussy man:
I only want
A set of nasty Klingons in
These shows."

The Executive said
"There, there,"
And went to
The Director.
The Director
Said, "There, there,"
And phoned up G.R.
The Producer said
"There, there!
I didn't really
Mean it.
We'll have Klingons in each episode
And Romulans here and there."

The Executive, he took The news And brought it to The Network Head. The Chief said, "Klingons, eh?" And jumped up off his chair. "Nobody," he said As he skipped round His office, "Nobody," he said As he slid down The bannisters, "Nobody, But nobody, Could call me A fussy man 🗕 But --I do like a few Nasty Klingons in this Show!"

Barbara Wright





#### OUTPOST ZERO

bу

### Valerie DeVries



The end of another mission. Circumstances had finally permitted Kirk to retire to his cabin for some badly-needed rest. As he entered he wondered if this last assignment would finally be that one mission too many. Emergency following emergency had diminished vital reserves. They were dangerously low on everyth ing-including morale.

Earlier he had scanned the latest status reports, and had found them to be very disquieting. On top of the mechanical and material losses, there was an average drop of 22% in the crew's overall efficiency rating. A dangerous situation should another emergency arise.

Massaging his temples, Kirk considered visiting McCoy for one of his more potent prescriptions. Reconsidering, he decided against such a move - that was another vital commodity that was running low. Smiling slightly, he wondered how Scotty was going to react to the possibility of another prohibition, such as had been in progress on Chigno IV on their last visit, causing the Chief Engineer considerable anguish.

However, the deciding factor against paying the doctor a visit was their present relationship. Every encounter recently had given McCoy another opportunity to lecture his Captain; each speech would state facts of which Kirk was already keenly aware. The discussions would generally end with one or both losing his temper.

A bizz at his door forestalled the desired shower and bed. Crossing to his desk, Kirk sat down gingerly as he called, "Come in, Bones."

Over the years Dr. Leonard McCoy had become accustomed to Spock's telepathic abilities; it unnerved him somewhat to think the Captain might also have acquired those same abilities.

"How did you know it was me?"

Hoping to cool McCoy's unusually combustible temper, Kirk smiled. "Spock is on the Bridge, and Scotty is nursing his engines. By a process of elimination..."

"All right, all right! Can you also tell me why I'm here?"

"Considering the way things have been going lately, I could probably figure it out."

"Good - then you can go ahead and figure out why we lost Ensign Poole."

At the look of pain on Kirk's face McCoy regretted his brusqueness.

"Why? How? You said his condition wasn't that serious."

Angry again, McCoy began to pace. "It wasn't, with the proper treatment, but I simply don't have the medical stores. We ran out of quinate, and by the time we'd manufactured a possible substitute, Poole was dead."

McCoy's desolation broke through Kirk's own grief. "Bones, I'm..."

A call from the Bridge intruded. "Bridge to Captain Kirk."

Unusually hesitant, Kirk pressed the intercom button. "Kirk here. Go ahead, Uhura."

"Sir, incoming message from Admiral Manther on Starbase 12."

Sighing resignedly, Kirk ordered, "Relay it here, Commander. Also, have Mr. Spock report to my cabin."

"Yes, sir. Admiral Manther coming through now."



Kirk steeled himself for what he feared was to come. Soon he was facing the newest Admiral in the Fleet. Only her eyes disclosed the worry she felt.

"I'm sorry, Jim. We've just received a distress call from Outpost Zero. Your orders are to proceed at maximum warp to investigate."

Kirk barely acknowledged Spock's quiet entry as he answered, "Admiral, it is my opinion that I will be endangering this ship and its crew if I obey those orders."

"Specify, Captain,"

"We are at present operating at minimum power due to engineering deficiencies. Also our medical stores are severely depleted. In fact, I ve already lost one crewman due to this condition."

"Captain Kirk, the closest Starship, besides the Enterprise, is 3.5 weeks away. Due to the outpost's proximity to the Romulan Neutral Zone, and the unknown nature of the distress signal, we dare not send anything less than a Starship."

McCoỳ could not contain his feelings any longer. "Hell, the condition this ship is in, a shuttlecraft would have more fire power than we do!"

Spock felt compelled to state the obvious. "Doctor McCoy, a shuttlecraft has no fire power."

"Precisely!"

"That's enough, Bones!" Trying to hide his distress, Kirk continued, "Admiral, there must be..."

"I'm sorry, Jim, I'm afraid you've drawn the short straw again. Good luck; Manther out."

The silence that followed the Admiral's announcement was eventually broken by a seething McCoy.

"Luck! We're going to need more than luck! It's going to take a bloody miracle. Jim, you can't do it! This time you've got to disobey orders. Once they see the condition this ship is in, no-one will hold you responsible."

Kirk sat in his chair, head in hands, McCoy's tirade seeming to have little effect. It was Spock who finally answered the doctor.

"There are 73 people stationed on Outpost Zero, Doctor. Whose responsibility would you say they are? Without us they have very little hope."

"Hope: What about the crew of this ship? Is that your so-called logic, Spock? Risking over 400 lives for 73?"

Sighing, Kirk answered, "Bones, it may not be logical, but it is our responsibility - now. We cannot abandon those people. And, given the opportunity, I don't believe a single member of this crew, including yourself with all your talk of logic, would willingly betray their trust in us."

Sheepishly, MCCoy looked away. If he had been truthful, he would admit it was concern for Kirk more than his concern for the ship that had prompted his objections. As depleted as the ship was, Kirk was much worse. For too long now he had been driving himself beyond the limit his body could endure. How much longer he would be able to keep going was outside of McCoy's knowledge.

Interrupting the doctor's reflections, Kirk added, "Bones, you'd better get down to Sickbay. Let me know what supplies you'll need — I'll see what I can do."

"If I need anything I'm quite capable of getting it on my own, Captain. I'll worry about Sickbay, you worry about getting us to Outpost Zero."

Concerned that his apprehension would penetrate Kirk's exhaustion and add to his worries, McCoy quickly exited, without noticing his friend's distress over what he had interpreted as another fight between them. As the doors closed behind him he heard Kirk on the intercom with Scotty.

"Mr. Scott, what is the top speed the engines can withstand?"

"Safely?"

"It would be preferable."

"Impulse!"

"Scotty, it's an emergency."

"Aye, I figured there'd be another one. Captain, anything over warp 8 and I won't guarantee our getting anywhere."

"Mr. Scott, may I suggest that you give top priority to the warp drive engines. It is entirely possible we may be making a fast getaway."

"Aye, we're doing our best, sir; we simply haven't got the equipment."

Kirk sighed at the familiar refrain. "Do the best you can, Scotty. Kirk out." Without giving himself time to reconsider, Kirk quickly called, "Kirk to Bridge."

"Bridge. Sulu here."

"Mr. Sulu, have Chief DeFalco plot a course for Outpost Zero. Set speed at warp 8. Oh, and Mr. Sulu, you'd better put the ship on alert status. Commander Uhura, have all the senior officers report to the main briefing room. Kirk out."

Finally turning his attention to Spock, Kirk reluctantly asked, "Analysis, Mr. Spock. What are the odds for a natural disaster?"

"Captain, there is a 67.3% probability that it is, in fact, Romulans. A military build-up along the Neutral Zone has been noted by Starfleet Command."

Anger replaced Kirk's exhaustion: "Why wasn't I informed of these developments?"

"I placed the tapes on your desk myself, sir. I am at a loss as to why..."

Disgusted with himself, Kirk interrupted, "I know why, Spock. I can't remember the last time I've had a chance to check my desk."

"It is quite understandable, sir. You have been somewhat busy of late."

Kirk smiled affectionately. "Thank you, Mr. Spock. Next time I need a defence attorney I'll be sure to consider you."

As the two friends walked to the briefing room, Kirk asked, "If Starfleet knew about the military build-up, why didn't they evacuate Outpost Zero? It's a research station with no hostile intentions. It isn't even part of the Neutral Zone monitoring system, like the others."

"Correct, Captain. They have no defensive shields or long range sensors. That is why Starfleet was unable to learn the precise nature of their attacker. They could supply no positive theory as to what was occurring."

Before entering the briefing room, Kirk stopped Spock. "It is common know-ledge that the outpost exists to monitor the Renoka Strip; and the Romulans are known for their surprise attacks, but it's just not their style to attack a defenceless installation."

"I believe you have an old Earth saying, 'There's a first time for everything'."

"Quite true, Mr. Spock. Shall we go in? I'm sure our questions will be answered soon enough."

The faces that turned to greet their arrival reflected the same emotion; the 'not us again' looks tore at Kirk's conscious. Without delay he addressed his officers.

"Gentlemen, we have received word from Starfleet that contact has been lost with Outpost Zero. We are the only ship within reasonable distance that can effect a rescue. I realise that ship's stores are dangerously low..."

Scott interrupted, feeling the Captain must be cognizant of all the facts before his decision became irreversable. "Captain, we've not visited a Starbase since our encounter with V'ger. Many of the new systems never were up to standard. And we simply haven't got any more backups for our backups."

"I'm aware of that, Scotty, but we cannot expose this quadrant or possibly the entire Federation, to an unknown danger. The meaning for the word Enterprise is, a readiness for daring action. Whatever lies ahead we must try to help her live up to her name."

Glancing round the table, Kirk could see the looks of resignation on the faces of his officers. Sighing slightly, he decided anything else he might say would be of little help. "Please report to Mr. Spock any critical shortages in your specific areas; a concentrated effort will be made to find a substitute. Dismissed!"

As the others filed from the room, Kirk noticed McCoy making his way toward him. Anticipating another argument, he took a deep breath and squared his shoulders.

"Here, Jim, I think you could use this." Before Kirk could protest, McCoy had a hypo to his arm.

Fxasperated, the Captain eyed his Chief Medical Officer. "All right, Bones, what did you give me this time?"

"You don't have to make it sound like I'm trying to poison you."

"From the way you left my cabin earlier, I wouldn't be a bit surprised if you were."

"Sorry about that, Jim. You ought to know my temper well enough by now. All I did was give you a simple tri-ox compound. The way you've been pushing yourself lately, you're practically living on the stuff."

"What are you doing, watering it down? I don't feel very different."

Rage flowed through McCoy's veins, not at his friend, but at Starfleet Command for pushing this man to such limits. "What little we have left is pure. It's you who's watered down! You know, Jim, worn-out parts on machines can be replaced, but your body doesn't come with spares."

"Thanks for the concern, Bones. I promise you, when this is all over, I'll turn myself over to you for a refitting."

"Did it ever occur to you that it might be too.late by then. Jim?"

Knowing there was nothing left he could say, Kirk quickly changed the subject. "How does the rest of Medical Sciences look, Doctor?"

"It could be better, but we'll do our part if Engineering can hold the ship together long enough."

"Thanks, Bones."

Shaking his head, McCoy realised that Kirk had once again gotten his own way. "You know, Jim, one of these days that charm of yours isn't going to work on me, then where will you be?"

"Without a Chief Medical Officer?"

"Fat chance!"

Having kept his own counsel during the last few minutes, Spock felt compelled to expound on McCoy's last remark. "Doctor, your vocabulary continues to astound me. Logically, a chance cannot be 'fat', since..."

"There's that word again! I swear, Spock, next time you have your physical, I'm going to look for a broken record."

Arching an eyebrow, Spock asked in pretended puzzlement, "Broken record?"

"Record: A 20th century device used for recording and playback."

"I know what a record is, Doctor. What I fail to understand is how a broken one would continue to operate, which is what you are implying. By its own definition, broken is..."

Again Spock found himself interrupted, this time by a laughing Kirk. "Give it up, Bones, but thank you - both. Spock, I do believe we're needed elsewhere."

As they made their way to the Bridge, Spock quietly inspected his Captain. The evidence of McCoy's concern was clearly visible. However, an intimate knowledge of Kirk's past actions made it abundantly clear that no amount of argument, logical or otherwise, would force him to do anything but what he felt was necessary. For the first time since their return to the Enterprise, Spock almost wished that Kirk was still Head of Fleet Operations. In that position, he would be safe on Earth, not flying into a possible trap with a ship that was operating on guts and little else.

As the doors opened to reveal the Bridge, Spock was surprised at their quick arrival. His concern for his Captain had apparently affected his timing sense. Characteristically, Spock refused to admit that he was also in a near state of collapse. In trying to take some of the burden off his Captain, he had continually worked through his meditation periods, thus reducing his resistance to outside stimuli.

Noting Kirk's entrance, Sulu relinquished the con. "Captain, we are now on heading 112.8 at warp 8. Chief DeFalco estimates our entering the vicinity of Outpost Zero in 6.3 hours."

Turning to Uhura, Kirk quickly received her report.

"Continuing to scan all frequencies. Neither we nor Starbase 12 have detected any transmissions since the initial distress signal."

"Thank you, Mr. Sulu, Commander. You two, along with Lt. Chekov, Chief DeFalco and Lt. Itanu, are relieved of duty. Get something to eat and some rest before reporting back here in five hours."

Grateful 'Yes, sirs' were said as the exhausted command crew quickly filled in their replacements and filed from the Bridge. Walking silently to his Captain's side, Spock Quietly suggested, "Jim, why don't you do the same? I am quite capable of commanding this ship."

Despite his tiredness, Kirk smiled as he shook his head. "Don't try using guilt to make me leave, Spock, it won't work. You don't exactly look in the 'green' yourself. In fact, I'm ordering you to get some rest. You are not to go to the science labs or to Engineering to help Mr. Scott. You are to go to your cabin and rest!"

"Captain, may I remind you how valuable you are to this ship."

"Well, Mr. Spock, you have just informed me that you are quite capable of commanding her, whereas I don't believe I would like to tackle your science console."

Having his own logic used against him brought about a feeling of frustration, an emotion Spock had never experienced till his association with Kirk. Only his Vulcan pride allowed him to keep it hidden now.

Gently, Kirk continued, "Get out of here, Spock. I'm fine - you should know better than to listen to McCoy."

Reluctantly, Spock relinquished his post, wishing vainly that logic would come to his rescue and suggest some method of dislodging Captain James T. Kirk from the Bridge. Somehow, the Captain must be made to listen to McCoy or himself. But, no plan came to mind as he slowly walked to his cabin. Once inside his own exhaustion quickly slipped him into an unconscious state.

상 상 **상** 

Four hours later Spock returned to the Bridge refreshed in body if not in mind. His first view of Kirk confirmed his earlier misgivings. The normally healthy, vibrant body was so obviously fighting for a semblance of control.

As McCoy entered he sent a worried glance in Spock's direction before quickly crossing to Kirk's side. "You rang, Captain?"

Bending closer, Kirk replied softly, "Sorry if I disturbed you, Bones, but I need another shot."

Shaking his head, McCoy realised that arguing would be pointless. Applying the hypo to Kirk's arm he couldn't resist saying, "I'm giving you this shot against my better judgement."

"We've already gone through it once, Bones. Let it rest."

McCoy wished that Kirk's words would make him angry, but, looking at his friend, all he could feel was a profound sadness that soon there would be nothing more he could do to stem Jim's collapse. Sighing resignedly, he headed back to Sickbay. As he entered the turbolift he passed Uhura, Sulu, Chekov, DeFalco and Itanu returning to the Bridge.

\* \* \*

As they finally approached the outpost overworked nerves were stretched to limits even seasoned veterans could no longer relax. The tension was finally broken by Spock.

"Captain, scans on the surface of Outpost Zero show no signs of life, though their accuracy is in some doubt. They do, however, show residual radiation caused by some form of explosive. Due to sensor breakdown I am unable to be more precise." Kirk reacted immediately. "Commander Uhura, signal red alert. Mr. Sulu, come about, heading 142.6."

Before Sulu could comply, the ship shook violently. Kirk's first notion was that the engines had finally blown.

Chekov quickly dispelled that idea. "Keptain, we are caught in a tractor beam."

"Mr. Spock?"

"Affirmative, though we are actually caught in three tractor beams, emanating from the three Romulan vessels coming into view now."

Kirk lost no time in contacting the engine room. "Mr. Scott, I need full power."

"I kin only give ye 68%, and even that could blow us all over the galaxy."

Checking the figures on his computers, Spock turned to give his report. "Captain, it is not sufficient."

"Stand by, Scotty. Uhura, see if you can contact their Commander."

"He has contacted us, Captain."

Before Uhura could switch to the Romulan channel, Kirk stopped her. "Commander, try for a visual of their bridge. I like to see who I'm talking to."

Nodding an acknowledgement, Uhura opened a channel to their captors. Working feverishly, she attempted to do Kirk's bidding, listening only peripherally to the conversation.

"This is Captain James T. Kirk of the U.S.S. Enterprise."

A harsh, but somewhat familair voice filled the Bridge. "Well, well, Captain Kirk, we're honored. Though we had heard than you were promoted. Have you been a bad boy?"

Kirk chose to ignore the question as he continued, "Commander, you have intruded in Federation space."

"You state the obvious, Kirk. I advise you to surrender your ship, or be destroyed."

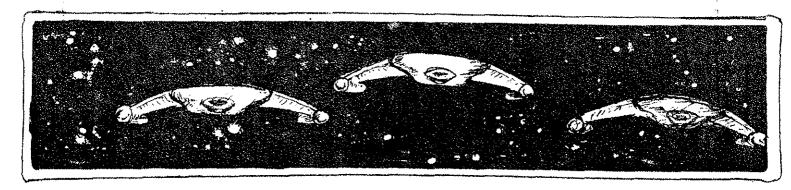
"You are the ones who have crossed the Neutral Zone. It is I who demand your surrender." Out of the corner of his eye Kirk saw Spock join Uhura. But, even with the additional assistance, she was unable to obtain a visual.

"Outnumbered three to one, and you still try to demand. You are everything I have heard you to be, Captain." Suddenly the voice became harsher. "I give you one hour. You will then be beamed aboard my ship for final capitulation."

"May I at least know to whom I am surrendering?"

"You will know within the hour. Oh, and Captain... do not try to escape or you will surely be destroyed."

The disembodied voice faded, leaving a silent Bridge. Exasperated, Kirk turned to his Communications Officer for an explanation.



Uhura, obviously frustrated, explained. "Every signal I sent was jammed and sent back. My board just couldn't handle the overload; there are too many disrupted circuits. I'm sorry, sir."

Mollified, Kirk tried to console his Communications Officer. "It's not your fault, Uhura. You did your best."

As Spock returned to his own station Kirk rose and crossed to the railing. "Spock, can the computer identify him from a voice print?"

Turning, Spock attempted to comply with his Captain's request. "Results are negative, sir."

"I wonder why it was so important for the Commander to keep his identity secret?"

"Unknown, Captain."

"I'm sure I'll find out soon enough. By the way, Mr. Spock, how were they able to pop out at us without warning?"

"As I've said, the sensors are not working at maximum efficiency. All the scanners used to detect a ship operating under the cleaking device are ineffective."

Flinching at the added evidence of a disintegrating Enterprise, Kirk replied, "Well. I guess it's time for another pow wow. Agreed, Mr. Spock?"

"I might, if I knew what a pow wow was."

"Why Mr. Spock, you are fallible. A pow wow is a meeting for discussion; which is exactly what we need right now. Uhura, have all the departement heads meet me in the main briefing room."

\* \* \*

A short time later Kirk confronted his departement heads. Expecting to see concern etched on their faces, he was appalled by the despair evinced by some of the younger officers. He began the meeting, hoping that by ignoring its existence the unstable atmosphere would disappear.

"Comments, anyone?"

"Why are we here?"

The look of surprise on Kirk's face was genuine. To his knowledge this was Lt. Powers' first briefing; it did not, however, excuse what amounted to insubordination. Realizing that Powers must be under a great deal of strain with his superior in Sickbay, Kirk decided to ignore the question.

· Mr. Scott..."

"I asked you a question!"

"Mr. Powers, I suggest you return to your quarters. We will take this matter up at a more appropriate time."

"Oh no. You're not putting me off like you do your trained monkeys here." Gesturing round the table, Powers failed to see the looks of anger directed his way. "We have a right to know why we're facing death instead of R & R. Everyone else around here might think you're some kind of God, but I don't."

"That will be all, Lieutenant." Hoping to avoid additional reactions among the crew, Kirk ordered, "Lt. Chekov, escort Mr. Powers to his quarters. He is to be confined till further notice."

Rising, Chekov complied with his Captain's request. "Yes, sir. Mr. Powers, come with me, please."

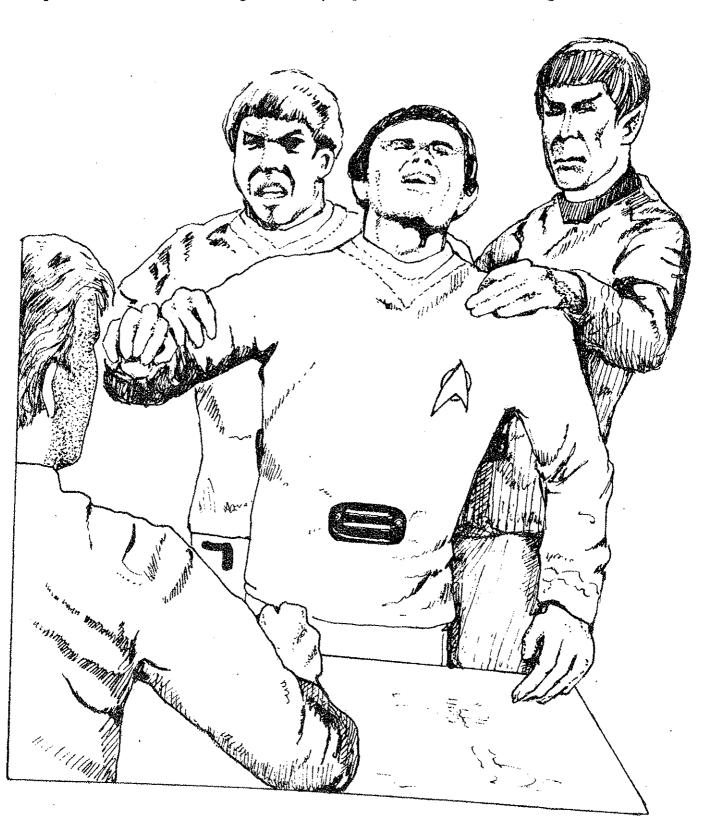
As Chekov advanced on him, Powers backed away. "I won't let you take me! Can't you see, he's trying to kill us all." When no indication of support was forthcoming, Powers began to get desperate. "How can you follow a murderer? Why

should we pay for his mistakes? Let him pay!"

As he rushed towards Kirk, Powers' intention was clear to every person in the room; but before he could reach his intended victim, Spock stepped in, applying the Vulcan nerve pinch. McCoy and Chekov quickly came forward to relieve the First Officer of his burden.

With a tired shake of his head Kirk sighed, "Take good care of him, Bones." Then, realising that he now lacked representation in a vital area, he asked, "Mr. Spock, who is next in line in supply?"

Ensign Shaefer, sir." Receiving a nod from his superior, Spock opened intership communications. "Ensign Shaefer, report to the main briefing room."



Taking a deep breath, Kirk resumed his explanation. "We are at present caught in the tractor beams of three Romulan vessels. Communications have been blocked, and an attempt to drop a distress buoy failed. We are virtually on our own."

As Kirk finished his explanation Shaefer entered, closely followed by McCoy and Chekov. Acknowledging their presence, Kirk continued, "Suggestions!"

"How about the Corbomite Maneuver?" submitted Sulu. "We've been fairly successful with it before."

Kirk shook his head ruefully. "Too successful, I'm afraid, Mr. Sulu. I'm sure every Romulan commander knows that bluff by now."

Spock agreed. "Quite correct, Captain; it has become a classic maneuver, but only with the unknown or uninformed."

As silence fell around the table Kirk decided to put forward an idea he had been formulating. "Mr. Spock, if we were able to generate more power to the engines, could we break those tractor beams? Use of the cloaking device has, in all probability, drained their reserves considerably. Add to that their attack on the outpost, and the initial journey - they could be in worse shape than we are."

Powers' outburst had affected Chekov more than he cared to admit, making him unusually pessimistic. "At three to one, Keptain, the odds are still in their favor."

Choosing to ignore Chelov's remark, Kirk continued to regard his Science Officer. "Mr. Spock?"

Reluctantly, Spock answered, "Sensors do show a significant drop in normal energy levels. However, at the moment they are incapable of providing an accurate reading."

With an eagerness that surprised his listeners, Kirk asked, "What do you think, Spock? Could we do it?"

Suspiciously, Spock regarded his Captain. "If we could obtain an energy build-up of 30%, I would estimate an 89% possibility of breaking two of the beams."

Exasperated, Scotty muttered, "Aye, or just as likely blow up the ship."

Kirk was beginning to feel irritated with his crew's rare defeatist attitude. "Mr. Scott, have you any recommendations?"

Deciding the haggis was already in the fire, Scotty exclaimed, "It all seems academic anyway, Captain. First, there are three tractor beams holding us, not two; and where in hades do you expect to find that extra power?"

Kirk took a moment to collect his thoughts. "If we close down all unneccessary systems and channel their energies to the engines, would it be enough?"

Spock found himself unable to 'read' his Captain. "What do you mean by unneccessary systems?"

"Rechannel all life support from decks 5, 6, 7 and 9, leaving only enough power to keep the Romulans from becoming suspicious."

Always his first concern, McCoy asked. "But Jim, what about the crew?"

"All essential systems will be operated by Canstal crewmembers. Their lungs are capable of storing air up to 45 minutes. If we haven't escaped in that time, it won't matter any more, anyway. All other personnel will be evacuated or placed on portable life support units."

Aided by the computer, Spock quickly calculated the percentages. "Captain, even with the extra power provided from life support, I estimate it will produce only 11% of the energy required. Where do you propose obtaining the other 19%?"

Leaning forward, McCoy earnestly enquired, "And what about that third tractor beam, Jim?"

Solemnly, Kirk regarded his officers. "To answer Mr. Spock's question first, the other 19% will come from the phaser banks."

A plethora of opposition greeted his statement. "Captain, you can't!" "It'll leave us helpless!" We'll be defenseless!"

Kirk took a deep breath before replying. "May I remind you, we are already defenseless, and will continue to be so as long as we are held by those tractor beams. In the present situation our phasers are useless - not to mention the fact that the condition of this ship wouldn't allow us to fight our way out of a Horta nursery."

Chekov spoke tentatively. "Keptain, if we do escape the Romulans will undoubtedly pursue."

"I would say that's a fair assumption, Mr. Chekov."

"Sir, we have no photon torpedos left, and with the phaser power redirected, I can't see that our escape will be prolonged."

Clancing round the table, Kirk could see that others agreed with Chekov's evaluation. "Gentlemen, it is vital that we report present circumstances to the Federation. Escape need only be long enough to make Starfleet aware of the Romulan infraction. The protracted safety of this ship and her crew is secondary."

Looking at the resigned expressions flashing across the faces of his officers, Kirk reflected on how much this had already cost; Ensign Poole his life, and Lt. Powers his career. Now, would it demand the ultimate sacrifice - his ship and her crew?

Quietly, McCoy's voice intruded. "Jim, you still haven't made that third tractor beam disappear."

"The Romulans will have to shut down one beam to transport me aboard their ship. If Mr. Scott is ready, you will have your two beams."

Fighting to keep his Vulcan control, Spock finally broke the silence that followed Kirk's statement. "Captain, may I point out what could happen if you are caught in their transporter beam when we warp out."

Throwing an apologetic look at his First Officer, Kirk shook his head. "You don't need to, Mr. Spock."

Angrily, McCoy interrupted. "What Spock's saying in his own inimitable way is, you'll be killed!"

Kirk threw a warning glance at his friend. "Bones."

"Jim, listen to me..."

"Bones, we'll talk about it later."

Scotty intervened. "Och, Captain, it wouldna make any difference. We canna be ready in time."

Calming, Kirk rubbed his hand across his eyes, clearly showing his exhaustion. "I was afraid of that. Well, the other options don't show much chance of success, but, as they say, it's better than no chance at all."

McCoy shook his head in resignation. "I have a feeling I'm not going to like this any better than I did the last."

Smiling, Kirk tried to ease the tension. "I can guarantee it, Bones. Actually, it's very simple; if we're lucky the Romulans will decide to conserve energy and leave the beam off."

McCoy's expression changed little as he asked, "And if we're not lucky?"

Glancing at his Science Officer Kirk reluctantly replied, "If they take me to the Bridge, I'll see what I can sabotage. Spock, I'll need a crash course on the layout of a Romulan bridge."

Angered by Kirk's willingness to risk his life once again, McCoy growled,

"If seems to be an awfully big word in your calculations, Captain."

"We haven't got anything else to work with, have we. Bones?"

His Vulcan mask firmly in place, Spock warned, "Captain, each option you have outlined shows a high probability that you will not survive."

Spock's failure to estimate to the exact decimal place the likely outcome of each endeavor clearly showed Kirk the concern his First Officer held for his Captain's life. Regretting that he could give no comfort to his friend, Kirk sighed.

"I'm still open to suggestions, gentlemen. I don't want to die. But as I've said before, the survival of this ship is crucial. The life of a single man holds little in relationship to the life of a universe."

Holding his head high, Kirk regarded his officers - and friends - with compassion. "Return to your duties, gentlemen. I'll be in Sickbay if needed. Dismissed!"

As the others filed from the room McCoy approached Kirk. "If you think you're going to Sickbay for another shot, you can forget it. I'm not sure what's keeping you on your feet now, but I refuse to help you commit suicide."

Putting a weary arm around his friend's shoulders, Kirk began the short walk to Sickbay. "Relax, Bones. While Spock is briefing me on the Romulan bridge, I want you to put a transponder in my arm."

Closely following his friends, Spock waited till they had reached the doctor's office before acknowledging his Captain's statement. "Jim, very little is known of the Romulan bridge. Moreover, their alliance with the Klingons has brought about changes with which we are nescient."

"I know that, Spock. We'll just have to take our chance that a little know-ledge is all that will be needed." Turing to the doctor, Kirk held out his arm with a questioning look.

Taking a deep breath, Spock fought to keep the control his Captain expected of the Enterprise Science Officer. It was a tenuous control at the best of times - but these were hardly the best of times. "Captain... Jim, why the transponder? Even if the sensors worked sufficiently to locate you, we lack the power to effect a rescue."

"You are not even to attempt a rescue, is that clear, Mr. Spock?" A reluctant acknowledgement from Spock allowed Kirk to turn his attention to McCoy. "You hear me, Bones?"

Sadly, McCoy agreed. "Then what do you want with a transponder?"

"Precaution - hope for a passibility, if not a probability, of rescue. I'm not doing this because I want to, but because there's nothing else I can do."

Watching the faces of his friends, Kirk could feel their pain. He knew how he would react if it were one of them in a similar situation. At this thought the possibility of losing his own life dulled in comparison to how he would feel if he were to lose Spock or McCoy. He realized it was selfish to be glad that the positions were not reversed, but he didn't care.

Wishing there was something he could do to ease their pain, Kirk mentally shook his head in defeat. Finally he broke a silence that was becoming unbearable.

"I'll be in my quarters. Mr. Spock, I'll meet you on the Bridge shortly." Feeling there was nothing left he could say, Kirk quickly exited.

The door had barely closed before McCoy growled, "Spock, do something. Stop  $\mbox{him!}$ "

Putting his hands behind his back to conceal his agitation, Spock regarded his collegue. "What would you have me do, Doctor?"

"I don't care... Hogtie him, lock him in his room... I don't know. Just something!"

"If the Romulans do not receive the Captain in precisely 40 minutes, statistics indicate that in all probability they will destroy this ship and her crew."

"Damn statistics! What's the matter, Spock? Are you afraid to die?"

Regarding the doctor with an icy stare, Spock refused to answer. As he started to exit McCoy stopped him.

"Spock, I'm sorry. That was a really stupid thing to say. I guess... I guess I'm just tired."

Realizing that it was not only exhaustion that had made McCoy lose his temper, Spock quietly explained, "Doctor, if the Enterprise were destroyed it would also destroy the Captain. You cannot stop him, and I will not destroy him."

At the look of resignation crossing McCoy's face Spock tried to retain his dignity. As he felt his control slipping he quickly headed for the Bridge, where, by ensconcing himself in his duties, he could momentarily forget the pending events.

\* \* \*

In the privacy of his own quarters Kirk allowed his shoulders to slump. The last month had been extremely wearing on his mind, as well as his body. Sometimes he had wondered of he were really capable of withstanding the rigors involved in commanding a Starship.

Mentally reviewing their previous five-year mission, he had to admit that at no time during that period had the Enterprise been subjected to the extreme pressures she was now facing. For ship and crew alike, this was the ultimate test.

Crossing to his desk, he opened the safe and pulled out a tape. It hadn't taken long after he had assumed command of the Enterprise for him to discover the importance of Spock's and McCoy's friendship. He'd also seen that, quite often, it was only his intervention that kept them from each others throats.

He had conceived the possibility that if anything should happen to him, there would be a small war on board the Enterprise. To this end he had made a tape with instructions to Spock and McCoy to listen to it, should he ever be declared dead. Only once before had the opportunity arisen for its use, but for some inexplicable reason they had not had the time to review it.

Why he had kept the tape all these years, Kirk could not have explained. That he had, made him very grateful. Emotionally, he did not believe he could withstand the pressure of recording another at this time.

As he gently laid the tape in a promin ent position on his desk, he whispered, "I hope it helps."

\* \* \*

Kirk returned to the Bridge only minutes before the Romulan deadline. Spock immediately informed him that Engineering would require an additional seventeen minutes before the energy transfer could be completed. All other stations were at peak efficiency — or at least the best that could be achieved under present conditions.

Following Spock's report an uncomfortable silence filled the Bridge. Finally, Uhura spoke.

"Captain, a transmission from the Romulan vessel."

Forcing a smile, Kirk answered, "Well, the Commander has one redeeming factor - he's punctual. Put him on, Commander... and I know it might not work, but keep trying to give me a visual." Privately, Kirk admitted that the disembodied voice was getting on his nerves.

Without warning the harsh tones of the Romulan Commander resounded through the Bridge. "Captain, I am disappointed. I gave you the hour in hopes that you would try to escape. From the reports I have on you I believed that you would prefer to die in battle."

A look of disbelief crossed Kirk's features as he replied, "I would rather not die at all. However, do I gather from your implication that our destruction is imminent?"

"No. I am surprised, but delighted - I did not believe that you would surrender so readily. You and your ship will be a great prize. Prepare to beam aboard in five of your Earth minutes, Captain."

The abrupt end to the Commander's transmission brought with it a depression Kirk found difficult to fight. If it was painful now, how much worse would it be in the transporter room? The ache he felt at saying goodbye to Spock was almost physical. And, if he did break down, what would that do to his Vulcan friend? The anguish this thought gave him helped him to do what he felt would be better for both of them.

Rising from his chair he crossed to the turbolift. "You have the con, Mr. Spock. Take good care of her for me." Before anyone could react, the lift was gone.

Taking a deep br eath, Kirk found it easier to control the raw emotion threatening to overwhelm him. It also helped to brace him for the ordeal ahead. Now, if only McCoy would stay in Sickbay...

But what he had hoped was not to be. As he entered the transporter room, McCoy was waiting.

When Kirk arrived alone, McCoy's fear for his friend turned to surprise. "Where's Spock?"

"He has the con."

"Do you think that was fair, Jim?"

"Who to - him or me?"

"Either of you!"

"What good will a long goodbye do any of us? If I hadn't already known you would disobey, I would have ordered you to stay in Sickbay. I think it's better if we keep our minds on the task at hand."

"Okay, Jim. Just remember, I'll have a bottle of brandy waiting for you."

"I'll be looking forward to it, Bones." As the sound of the transporter beam grew, Kirk Quickly finished, "Take care of yourself, and take care of him."

Before McJoy could find an answer. Kirk was gone.

Materialising on board the Romulan vessel, Kirk found it difficult to conceal his shock. But, as he would soon discover, the surprises were just beginning.

35 - 35 - 35

Logically, Spock could understand the Captain's motive for leaving him the con. Personally, he felt cheated. When you didn't have many, every minute together was precious

Automatically checking the Bridge, Spock could see that, though he felt it more deeply, the loss was not his alone. Determindly, he called Engineering.

"Mr. Scott, status report."

"It'll take another twelve minutes, Mr. Spock. Ah... is the Captain...?"

"The Captain is in the transporter room. Need I mention that time is short,  $\operatorname{Mr}$ . Scott?"

"Aye, Mr. Spock. I'll let ye know when we're ready. Scott oot."

Turning to check the current energy levels with Chekov, Spock was interrupted by a call from the transporter room.

"Bridge, this is McCoy. Jim's gone."

\* \* \*

Aboard the Romulan vessel, Kirk found it difficult to suppress his laughter. However, a smile did escape.

The same harsh voice he had heard on the Bridge spoke. "I'm glad you find the situation amusing, Captain, though I am at a loss to understand why."

"I've been told that I have a strange sense of humor, Commander."

When a look of puzzlement greeted his statement, Kirk tried again. "Commander, haven't you ever found yourself in a position so incongruous you just had to laugh?" At the look of disbelief on the Commander's face, Kirk shook his head. "Forgive me, I sometimes forget how regimented the... Klingon Empire is."

"In that you are correct, Captain. We pride ourselves on our consistency and its strengths."

"That I can attest to, Commander."

"Shall we proceed?"

"First, may I know with whom I am dealing?"

"Of course. I am Commander Kaleth. Now then, your surrender will of course be unconditional."

"On the contrary, I have many conditions."

Kaleth regarded Kirk sternly. "As I have said, there will be no conditions, Captain. You do realize I can destroy your ship?"

"No, Commander, I don't think you can, or you would have done so already. I think you need something, and it's not hard to guess what."

"We need your dilithium crystals, Captain."

"You're kidding!"

Never having had close contact with a Human before, Kaleth failed to understand the sarcasm inherent in Kirk's voice. "You will be allowed to contact your ship and prepare them for boarding."

"Now why should I do that?"

"Because it buys them more time. I have studied the psychology of your people, Captain. Like the others of your species, you feel where there is life there is hope, foolish though it may be. Now we will go to the Bridge. Please do not try anything heroic. I would hate it if anything should happen to you now. My brother would never forgive me."

Kirk had an idea he wasn't going to like the answer, but he decided to ask anyway. "Who is your brother?"

"I cannot be precise on the exact circumstances of your meeting, but my brother was Commander Koloth."

Somehow Kirk managed to appear resigned and exasperated at the same time. "I should have guessed. You got any other surprises up your sleeve?"

Kaleth's look of confusion was genuine. "Surprises up my sleeve?"

Kirk's look of disgust was equally genuine. "I wish they would make an English slang dictionary required reading in all military academies."

Deciding to ignore Kirk's latest comment since he didn't understand it anyway Kaleth ordered, "Quiet! You will follow me. Remember my warning, Captain."

As they walked to the Bridge, Kirk realized the Enterprise's situation was far worse than his own. For personal reasons Kaleth wanted Kirk alive; but once it was learned that Klingons were commanding the Romulan Bird of Prey, the destruction of the Enterprise was assured - Kaleth could not afford to let them escape with that knowledge. And they obviously couldn't take the Enterprise in tow.

Somehow he must let Spock know what was happening - and that Scotty had run out of time. If they could escape before the Klingons boarded, Kaleth might decide not to pursue in order to conserve energy.

\* \* \*

In an effort to bury his pain Spock turned to Security. "Mr. Chekov, have the Romulans reinstated the third tractor beam?"

"Negative, Mr. Spock. However, sensors do indicate a slight increase in the other two beams. Do you think that will hamper our escape attempt?"

"It certainly won't help, Mr. Chekov. Please continue to monitor the readings closely while I inform Mr. Scott."

Entering the Bridge, McCoy heard the last half of Spock's statement. "What are you going to tell Scotty, Spock?"

"If you care to listen, Doctor, you may; I will, however, say it only once."

"Why you... If Jim were here..." Immediately, McCoy regretted his outburst.

Sternly facing forward, Spock murmured, "Doctor, have you forgotten already? Are we to be... 'locked in mortal combat' once again?"

Shaken, McCoy remembered the last time he had heard those words. The circumstances had been painful, but the words had proven to be immeasurably helpful. For them both, the words had been a reminder that the burden of command was not Spock's alone. But they had also reminded McCoy that Spock was the only one in command - and his decisions must be obeyed.

Resolutely ignoring McCoy, Spock called Engineering. "Mr. Scott, we're running out of time."

"Just five more minutes, Mr. Spock."

"I hope we have those minutes. Mr. Scott."

As Spock closed the connection, MCCoy moved closer to the command chair. "Spock, I'm sorry. It seems to be a habit with me to cause you problems when Jim's not around."

"I think I can understand - Bones."

"I'll be in Sickbay if you need me. Spock."

"Doctor..."

Uhura's excited voice intruded. 'Message coming in, Mr. Spock. It's the Captain!"

\* \* \*

Entering the alien bridge, Kirk saw very little that looked even vaguely familiar. About this time he realized there was one contingency they had not taken into account - he had no way of knowing if the third tractor beam had been reinstated. A quick glance was all that was needed to show him that he had absolutely no idea where the controls could be, or even if they were on the bridge. Spock's quick briefing held no resemblance to what he was now seeing. Additionally, security was grouped so tightly around him that random destruction was impossible. Well, he would just have to hope that Spock felt lucky. Remembering how Spock would react to his thoughts on luck, Kirk suddenly grinned, which elicited a puzzled look from his captors, but no comment.

Stopping next to his Communications Officer, Kaleth turned to Kirk. "Captain,

you may now communicate with your ship. Remember, if you try to tell them what you have discovered, you will never say another word."

"It's your ball game, Commander."

"Ball game?"

Sighing resignedly, Kirk explained, "An old Earth expression meaning, you're in charge."

"Naturally! Proceed, Captain."

Thinking fast, Kirk asked, 'Mr. Spock?"

"Here, Captain."

"A boarding party will beam over in five minutes. You are to offer no resistance. Cling on to the space you have, Mr. Spock, and I hope all your tribbles are little ones. Go for it, Mr. Sulu. Kirk out!"

Kaleth regarded Kirk suspiciously. "That was a very strange message, Captain."

"If you don't like it, next time you write the script."

"There will be no next time." Gesturing to the security guards, Kaleth ordered, "Take him to a detention cell. I won't need you for a while, Captain Kirk."

Kirk had not gone far when Kaleth stopped him. "Kirk, what is a tribble?"

A smile appeared on Kirk's face as he answered, "Tribble is another word for trouble." He felt a certain satisfaction (and relief) that the tribbles had so upset (and embarrassed) the Klingon heirarchy that their existence had been classified top secret.

Puzzled - a state of mind Kaleth had endured since Kirk's arrival - the Commander angrily waved his men and their captive off the bridge. Privately, Kaleth hoped he would not have to deal with Kirk again. The captive was somehow able to put his captors at a disadvantage.

As he was marched to his new quarters, Kirk hoped there was some way he would know if the Enterprise escaped safely. It looked to be a long and lonely wait till the Empire and Koloth. He didn't need anxiety over the Enterprise preying on his mind the entire journey.

Arriving at his new home, he discovered another surprise waiting. Shaking his head and smiling, Kirk spoke softly so his new roommate couldn't hear.

"It's a good thing I'm in good physical condition or this latest, and I hope last, surprise would have been the death of me."

\* \* \*

On the Enterprise a shocked silence followed Kirk's speech. Puzzled, McCoy asked, "What did he say? Spock, you don't think they've drugged him, do you?"

"No, Doctor. It was the Captain's intention to apprize us of some pertinent information."

"What information?"

"The fact that the ship is manned by Klingons, not Romulans as we have been led to believe."

McCoy raised an eyebrow in confusion. "Did we hear the same speech?"

Patiently, Spock explained. "There were two clues, Doctor. First, 'cling on to the space you have', and second, his reference to tribbles. If you will remember, we dealt with Klingons when we first encountered the species on Space Station K-7."

Sulu was far from patient as he interrupted, "Mr. Spock, he also told me to go for it."

"Exactly, Mr. Sulu. Let us hope that Mr. Scott is ready."

Before Spock could check with Scotty, Chekov asked, "Vhat I don't understand is vhy the boarding party?"

McCoy's medical mind could not assimilate the militaristic moves. "And Spock, why did Jim risk telling us it was Klingons when we'll see that for ourselves? What do they want that badly?"

"Obviously, our dilithium crystals, Doctor. It is my opinion the Captain wants us to escape before they are allowed to beam on board. Which, if I am permitted to continue, we will attempt to do."

Properly stifled, McCoy made his way to the turbolift. "I think I'll go deal with my non-existent medical supplies; it's easier than dealing with you, Spock." About to leave, McCoy stopped to listen to Scotty's report.

Spock ignored the doctor as he called Engineering. "Mr. Scott, we have run out of time."

"We've just finished. Mr. Spock, but I won't guarantee it."

"There are very few actual guarantees in life, Mr. Scott. Please keep me informed. Spock out." Turning to the helmsman, Spock ordered, "Mr. Sulu, prepare to come to full power."

"With cold engines, sir?"

"Necessary, if we hope to break free. Hnergy levels of the tractor beams, Mr. Chekov?"

"Still rising, but very slowly."

Turning to Lt. Johnson, who had replaced him at the science console, Spock ordered, "Lieutenant, correlate the readings from Mr. Chekov's snesors with the completed energy transfer. Is it sufficient?"

"Bridge, this is the transsorter room. The Romulans have signalled their readiness for transfer."

"Chief Rand, acknowledge the transmission, but do not beam them aboard." Though puzzled. Rand quickly complied. "Yes. sir."

Turning to Lt. Johnson, Spock asked, "Lieutenant, what is the result of your computer check?"

Nervously, the Lieutenant considered her department head. "The computers are still working, sir."

Knowledge of the equipment and its present deficiencies made Spock wish he could convey his compassion to the young Lieutenant. Unable to do so, he quickly turned to navigation.

"Chief DeFalco, set course for 153.8. Mr. Sulu, are you ready?"

Swallowing his nervousness, Sulu brought his hand up to hover over the warp drive controls. "Yes, sir!"

"Then get us out of here, Mr. Sulu. Right - now!"

Applying full power as ordered, Sulu held his breath when the ship began to shake under the strain. Everyone waited, wondering if the Enterprise was going to blow up or be torn apart by the tractor beams.

35 at 35

Kirk began to wonder about his sense of humor. Confronting his roommate, he was barely able to suppress open laughter. However, a smile did escape.

"Captain Kirk, I'm glad you find your captivity so amusing."

"I must admit that I have had roommates with far less enchantment, Commander."

The Romulan Commander, first encountered whilst stealing the cloaking device, regarded Kirk with disgust. "That hardly calls for laughter."

"Commander, you're the last in a long line of surprises. I'm the prisoner of some goon who wants me as a prize for his brother. My ship is literally falling apart, and 73 Federation scientists are dead. How would you suggest I react? Anger only uses up energy, and at the moment I don't have any to spare."

Ignoring Kirk's remarks, the Commander unsuccessfully tried to hide her satisfaction. "So, they've captured the illustrious Enterprise. Kaleth is smarter than I thought."

"Not smart, lucky! Although, come to think of it, he did capture three of your ships, so he can't be as dumb as I thought."

Angrily the Commander faced Kirk. "We had a treaty-which he broke! They were supposed to be our allies, there was no reason not to trust them."

"I can see you've got a lot to learn about Klingons."

The destruction of life, any life, was abhorrent to Kirk. Since the Commander was the only Romulan he had seen, he was worried. Klingons were not noted for their humanity.

"What happened to your crew?"

The Commander's anger faded to a controlled despair. "I don't know. I haven't been out of this room since they captured us."

Changing what appeared to be a painful subject, Kirk asked, "Well, Commander, any ideas on how we're to escape?"

A very indigent Commander replied, "We?"

"We! Tike it or not, we've just become allies."

"Now why should I thust you any more than I would them?"

While trying to appear calm, privately Kirk fumed. He could not be certain that Spock had deciphered his message, and even if he had, would the Enterprise escape to make the report: The Commander must be made to see that their escape was vital to the safety of both their ideals.

"Because you have no choice. If we don't escape and inform the Federation and the Romulan Empire about who's behind this incident, there's going to be a war. After we've finished knocking each other around enough, the Klingons will come in and finish us both off. Then there won't be any more Federation or Empire. We'll all be under Elingon domination."

"But you and I, we're enemies! We would destroy each other."

"What rule is there that says we have to? When asked how he would destroy his enemies, a great man once replied, 'Do I not destroy them when I make them my friends?'. That's the only way I plan to destroy you, Commander; so what's the verdict?"

W # 5

Minutes after applying full power, Scotty was calling the Bridge. "Mr. Spock, the engines are going critical."

"Maintain full power, Hr. Scott."

"But they could blow us up any minute."

"If they don't, the Klingons certainly will."

"Klingons! I thought we were fighting Romulans."

'Mr. Scott, you will be briefed later on the recent developments. For the present, please return to your engines."

\* Abraham Lincoln

Before the connection could be broken the crew heard Scotty grumble, "The blasted engines will probably blow, and I'll never find out what's going on."

No-one had time to react to Scotty's remark as the Enterprise suddenly broke free of her captors. The initial power surge threw them well out of the range of the tractor beams.

Spock forestalled further cheering as he ordered Sulu to warp down to a safer level. Turning to the Security Officer, he inquired, "Mr. Chekov, scan the Klingon vessels. What is their status?"

Pausing momentarily, Chekov checked his readings. "Mr. Spock, we tore the hearts out of them. Two wessels are dead and the third is not pursuing. We made it!"

A call from Engineering prompted McCoy to answer, "You may have been a bit hasty, Mr. Chekov."

Spock ignored both remarks. "Status, Mr. Scott?"

"She's holding together, Mr. Spock. Though I canna explain to ye how."

"Very good, Mr. Scott, keep me imformed. Spock out."

Unrealized, the intercom did not disengage, and the Bridge crew could once again hear an unusually perverse Scotty mumbling, "I don't see why I should, you don't tell me anything. First we're fighting the Romulans, then it's the Klingons. Next it'll be Ethelred the Unready. Infrint" \*

A grinning Uhura quickly closed the circuit to Engineering. Incredibly, she actually blessed the malfunction in the communications system that had allowed t them to listen in on the Chief Engineer's mutterings. Scott's remarks had greatly relieved the previously building tension.

About to check the cause of the malfunction, she stopped when a bright light flashed across the viewscreen. Before anyone could react, a second explosion occurred in the same vicinity.

Spock turned to Security. "Mr. Chekov, explain."

Swallowing in consternation, Chekov replied, "Two of the enemy ships have exploded. But Mr. Spock... why? They weren't that badly damaged."

\* \* ;

After ordering a security team to the transporter room, Kaleth continued to mull over Kirk's statements. Most had made very little sense to the literal-minded Klingon. Additionally, the Kirk he had met did not resemble the Kirk his brother had described. Raleth found it inconceivable that he could have captured the indomitable Enterprise so easily. From what he understood, it had been over two years since Kirk had been in space. The absence obviously showed. No Klingon would allow himself to be used in the manner Kirk had. Apparently, he should have stayed behind a desk.

Further conjectures were interrupted by Kaleth's First (fficer. "Commander, the Enterprise is attempting to escape."

"Coordinate phaser banks."

"It's too late, Commander. They're already out of range with our present energy levels. Shall we pursue?"

"What is the status of Kaele and Kulta?"

"Critical. Kaele has two functional dilithium crystals, and Kulta has only one."

Showing no emotion, Kaleth ordered, "They are to transfer their remaining crystals to us. Then they are to destroy their ships."

"Commander?"

\* Gaelic for "Hell!"

A look from Kaleth quickly silenced the First Officer's protest.

Kaleth appeared satisfied as he explained, "It makes little difference if the Enterprise escapes, since they believe themselves to have been attacked by Romulans. We must leave no evidence to make them believe otherwise. In their present condition, Kaele and Kulta will be unable to return to the Empire undetected. So they must be destroyed. Execute!"

Moments later, Kaleth showed no reaction as the two ships exploded. "Set an indirect course for home, Navigator, while I 'talk' to Captain Kirk."

Fighting an inner remorse, Chekov tried to concentrate on his sensor readouts. Thinking about the number of men that must have populated the two ships between their Klingon and Romulan crews, all he could see was hisown role in their destruction. Then he began to feel guilty about feeling guilty, though he understood he was only doing his job. It didn't help. Needing comfort, he turned to the command chair, only to remember its present occupant would be unable to give him the consolation he needed.

Suddenly he realized that even in his absence Kirk was capable of soothing his nerves. How many times had he turned to see guilt and pain flash across Kirk's face at the destruction of an entity, be it friend or foe? It wasn't wrong to feel remorse over the needless ending of life. It was necessary, if you also learned control.

A question from Spock broke through Chekov's shocked reaction to the needless destruction he had just witnessed. "Mr. Chekov, are we being pursued?"

The Security Chief of the U.S.S. Enterprise confidently answered, "Negative, Mr. Spock."

Though: Spock should have felt satisfaction at their escape, he could not. He had been forced to leave his friend and his life. In an attempt to shake off his depression he decided that Mr. Scott had waited long enough for his explanation.

Turning to the helmsman he ordered, "Mr. Sulu, I shall be in Engineering. You have the con. Ms. Uhura, please notify me when we are in direct communications range with Starbase 12."

Checking her instruments, Uhura replied, "Due to some faulty circuits it could take another 10.2 hours. Should I send a report through channels, sir?"

"Negative, Commander. If the Klingons decode our message the Captain's life will be forfeit."

Unable to keep quiet, McCoy stepped closer. "Spock, you can't really believe they'll let Jim live. He's been a thorn in their side for years. If you don't send that message, and we don't make it for some intangible reason, all that Jim will have to endure will be for nothing."

Spock refused to look at McCoy. "Doctor, I will not endanger the Captain's life further."

"What do you think they're doing over there? Playing chess? Jim's life is already forfeit - the least you can do is give it reason."

"My decision stands, Doctor. Commander Uhura, you have your orders."

Crossing to the turbolift, Spock was not surprised to find McCoy at his heels. In the privacy of the lift he asked, "Yes, Doctor?"

Following Spock, McCoy's curiosity overcame his anger. "What I don't understand is, why the big deception? Why make us believe we were attacked by Romulans?"

"That's obvious, Doctor. The Klingons hope to create a war between the Federation and the Romulan Empire, with themselves carefully neutral. As you

know, no-one ever truly wins a war. When both sides are sufficiently depleted, the Klingons will simply step in and take over."

McCoy looked shaken as he realized the feasibility of the conspiracy. Hopefully, he asked, "Would the Organians allow that to happen?"

"In a very short time, Doctor, the Organians will be in no position to stop it."

"What are you talking about?"

"We have only recently learned that the Organians are a cycle race. Every five thousand Marth years they must regenerate their extreme expenditures of energy. Ayleborne alone will remain active, in order to protect their planet. The cycle is somewhat similar to that of the Horta on Janus VI, though in the case of the Organians they won't die; it's more like they'll be reborn."

"What does that mean, Spock?"



"It means, Doctor, that the Federation is on its own again."

"Do the Klingons know that, or is this incident their usual mischief making?"

"Unknown. But, with their capture of Captain Kirk, they now have the means to find out."

36 36 X

Approaching the brig, Kaleth ordered the guards to bring Kirk to a nearby rec room. He was unwilling to challenge the Captain in the presence of the Commander.

As Kirk entered Kaleth slapped him hard across the face. "What did you tell your ship?"

Successfully hiding his anger, Kirk replied, "You were there. I told them what you told me to tell them. Why?"

"They have attempted to escape, and in doing so destroyed Kaele and Kulta. Somehow, I do not believe you to be as innocent as you claim."

Seeing the gesture from Kaleth, Kirk braced himself expectantly. It came as no surprise when a fist slammed into his stomach. The guard, who considerably outweighed Kirk, followed the initial blow with several others, stopping only when Kaleth waved his hand.

When his breath finally returned and the pain subsided sufficiently to allow him to speak, Kirk gasped, "Isn't this rather barbaric?"

"I regret, Captain, that the Romulans do not have a proper interrogation chamber. Again, what did you tell your ship?"

"Listen, if the Enterprise has escaped, they did it without direct orders from  $\operatorname{me}_{\bullet}$ "

"Ah, but they didn't escape, Captain. They were destroyed in the attempt."

Kirk felt a despair much more agonizing than any physical torture Kaleth could inflict.

\* \* \*

Having advised Mr. Scott of the recent developments, Spock decided to remain in Engineering to aid the overworked crew, work which would keep his mind as well as his body busy. Though he would never admit it aloud, it was very painful to sit in the chair that should not be his, and that he did not want.

Ten hours later, Uhura called to remind him that contact with Starbase 12 would soon be possible. Checking the status of the engines with the Chief Engineer, Spock hurried to the Bridge. He was not surprised to find Dr. McCoy already present.

Turning as Spock entered, Uhura informed him, "Starbase 12 has contacted us. Admiral Manther on the line now, sir."

Modding acknowledgement, Spock ordered, "Open a channel, Commander."

When Manther's face first appeared on the screen she seemed stunned to see Spock sitting in the command chair. Recovering quickly, she demanded, "Report, Mr. Spock."

Quietly, Spock explained the fate of Kirk, Outpost Zero, and the Klingon conspiracy. Emphasizing the apparent innocence of the Romulan Empire, he recommended an immediate council with their leaders to clear up any misunderstanding that might incur from the destruction of two of their vessels on the Federation side of the Neutral Zone.

Agreement showing on her face, Admiral Manther was nonetheless noncommital. "I shall submit your recommendation to Starfleet. In the meantime, your mission

is to be considered a success, and you are to be commended. I shall inform you later of Starfleet's decision. Manther out."

McCoy could not believe that after all they'd been through, that was all the Admiral would say. She had made no mention of Kirk, or issued any further orders.

"That's it? That's all she has to say? What about us? Are we supposed to sit out here and twiddle our thumbs while Starfleet gets some more bright ideas?"

Softly, Spock stopped McCoy's tirade. "I believe the Admiral is leaving the decision to us. Commander Uhura, have all department heads meet me in the main briefing room."

Walking to the turbolift, Spock turned and regarded McCoy. "Are you coming, Doctor?"

Resignedly, McCoy joined Spock. "Why not. Do you realize we've spent more time in that room lately than in our quarters? I'm thinking of installing a bed."

Spock shook his head. "I would not call that significant input, Doctor."
"No, I don't suppose you would."

Entering the briefing room, Spock and McCoy found Scotty and Ensign Shaefer already present. A few minutes later, Spock was able to start the meeting.

"We have been in contact with Starbase 12 and have informed them of the situation. Our orders from Captain Kirk have been carried out. Admiral Manther has not issued any new orders, so we have a decision to make. We can either continue to Starbase 12 for lengthy repairs, or return to Outpost Zero and begin a search for the Klingons and Captain Kirk. Recommendations?"

Though young, Ensign Shaefer was quite capable, and not afraid to speak up. "Mr. Spock, before you make a decision, I must inform you that at the present level of consumption we have only enough food for approximately 18 more days."

Obviously distressed, Scotty also had to give an honest evaluation. "Mr. Spock, ye've seen the engines. The fastest we can go now is warp 3, and I'm not sure how long that will last."

Regretfully, Chekov said, "We have no defensive system, sir. All the energy for the shields and phasers has been redirected to Engineering."

"Aye, and changing it back would stop us dead in space," added Scotty.

Realizing that they were talking about Kirk's life, Sulu could not keep quiet. "If we wait till after the repairs, the Klingons could escape back into the Empire. And even if they don't, the residual radiation trail will have disappeared."

Knowing the condition of his equipment, Chekov reluctantly replied, "Even if we do go back, the sensors are in such poor condition they may be unable to follow a radiation trail."

Spock's expression had not altered as each person spoke. Finally, when no-one had anything more to add, he dismissed his officers. As he had anticipated, McCoy did not leave with the others.

Speaking almost to himself, Spock said. "I should have stayed in Gol."

"Do you think you would have felt any better there, when you found out  $\operatorname{Jim}$  was missing - or dead?"

"There, Doctor, I would not be the one who had to decide his fate."

"He's one man, Spock. Very important, but only one."

"Are you suggesting we do not attempt a rescue?"

"No, for once I'm keeping my big mouth shut. It's your decision. Jim always had faith in you, now all you need is faith in yourself."

Thoughtfully, Spock reviewed the fact. Reluctantly, he called the Bridge. "Fr. Sulu, set a course for Starbase 12, warp factor 3."

Silence greeted Spock's announcement. Finally Sulu's, "Aye, aye, sir," came softly over the intercom.

Closing the channel, Spock's shoulders slumped. Suddenly he felt a pressure on his arm, and glanced up to see McCoy with hypo in hand.

"You're as bad as Jim. Not enough food or rest. That vitamin supplement should help for now."

Regarding the doctor without expression, Spock finally spoke. "I think it would have been easier for all of us if he had stayed on Earth."

McCoy looked dubious, remembering his fight to keep Kirk on the Enterprise, and the person Kirk had later become. "Maybe, but I don't think so, Spock. For him, sitting at that desk was an imitation death. At least out here it would be the real thing."

Kaleth's henchmen were far from gentle as they returned Kirk to his quarters. Picking himself up off the floor, he was not surprised when the Commander offered no assistance. Determinedy he decided to hide his knowledge of the fate of the Enterprise and of the Commander's other two ships. Mursing what appeared to be a number of broken ribs, Kirk gently lowered himself onto a chair, too exhausted to do anything else.

"Well, have you thought of a way to get us out of here yet?"

The Commander was stunned that after all he had suffered Kirk's mind could return to their interrupted conversation. "Who, me?"

Glancing round the room in exasperation, Kirk pointed out, "First, unless I've missed something, you and I appear to be the only inhabitants of this room; second, my mind has been occupied elsewhere for the past few minutes; and third, this is your ship, so you know it a hell of a lot better than I do!"

"Of course I know my ship!" snapped the Commander.

"Good, now we're getting somewhere." Kirk regarded his co-conspirator expectantly.

"That is exactly why I can tell you there is no possible avenue of escape."

"Whoops, detour!"

"What is a detour?"

"It's a play on words. You said 'avenue of escape', so when you didn't agree I said 'detour', get it?"

When the Commander continued to look mystified, Kirk gave up. "Next time Bones wants to give me a check-up, I'll have to ask him to check my sense of humor. I haven't been going over very big lately."

Returning to their discussion, Kirk gently rose from his seat and advanced on the Commander. "Listen, Lady, a detour means I have no intention of becoming an experimental animal for some Klingon sadist, so you'd better start thinking again."

As the Commander regarded him in offended silence, Kirk shook his head. "Dead end." Suddenly a new idea hit him. Forcing a calm he did not feel he asked, "Commander, isn't there more honor in dying while fighting than to sit passively by waiting for what is to come? If I remember correctly, your people put a great deal of significance on the honor of the individual."

"We are also a logical people, Captain. We know when we have lost."
"In other words, you're quitters."

Turning on Kirk with fists clenched, the Commander replied, "That's not what I said."

"That's exactly what you said! When there appears to be no more hope, you give up - you quit! Haven't your people realized yet that the only time there is no hope is when you're dead?"

Seeing the pain that flashed across Kirk's face, the Commander believed it to be caused by the severe beating he had been subjected to. She could not know that it was as a result of his realizing that all hope was now lost for his friends and his ship. A fact that would have to be dealt with later - if there was a later.

Refusing to admit out loud that Kirk was right, the Romulan Commander turned her back and demanded, "Just keep quiet and let me think."

Relaxing, Kirk admitted to himself that this time he had to let someone else find the answers. He just wished that someone else were Spock.

\* \* \*

"Mr. Spock, Starbase 12 has given us permission to dock."

When no answer was forthcoming, Uhura turned to regard her commander.

Thinking he might not heave heard, she began to repeat, "Mr. Spock, Starbase..."

"Acknowledged, Commander. Mr. Sulu, initiate docking procedures."

"Yes, sir." Puzzled, Sulu performed the operation automatically. Never before had he seen Spock act quite so 'distant', not even when he had first come back aboard.

Intering the Bridge, McCoy saw the worried glances directed at the command chair. It didn't take second sight to understand why. Crossing to Spock, he hesitated before placing his hand on his friend's arm.

"Spock, you're in command now,"

"That is a fact I hardly need to be reminded of, Doctor."

"I'm not so sure about that. Not unless the only department you've been ignoring is Medical Sciences."

"Doctor McCoy, you will return to your duties." Looking directly at McCoy for the first time since his decision to return to base, Spock continued, "That is an order!"

McCoy tried to stutter an answer, but Spock interrupted, "As you have s stated, I am now in command."

Thoughtfully, McCoy regarded his adversary. Through the years he had learned to interpret many of Spock's mannerisms. When he first entered the Eridge he had believed Spock's actions, or inactions, were due to his feelings of grief and despair. But when Spock had looked him in the eye he had seen hope reflected in the dark pools before him. A hope that McCoy now knew was mirrored in his own eyes. Spock had a plan, a way to rescue Jim.

About to enter the turbolift, McCoy stopped and looked back at the command chair with its rigid occupant. Unaware that he was speaking aloud, McCoy exclaimed, "If you think you're going without me, Spock, forget it!"

\$ X X

As two Klingon guards entered their prison, Kirk regarded his companion. "Commander. I think you took too long."

Aiming their disruptors at Kirk, the taller of the two ordered, "Commander Kaleth wishes to speak with you."

Remaining in his seat, Kirk answered, "I'll pass, thank you. I didn't enjoy ou'last conversation."

"You will obey the Commander's orders!"

"Why should Ir He's your commander, not mine."

Ignoring Kirk's statement the Klingons advanced, each taking an arm and lifting with little effort.

Finding himself not only off his chair but off his feet, Kirk resigned himself to the inevitable. "I've always wanted to say this. Take me to your leader!" Seeing the worry the Commander could not hide, Kirk smiled ruefully. "Don't wait up for me."

Halfway to the interrogation room, Kirk grew tired of being manhandled. "I'm quite capable of walking, if you clowns would put me down."

The larger of the two completely ignored Kirk's suggestion; the other, however, regarded him in puzzlement. Almost against his will he asked, "What is a clown?"

As he felt the hands on his arms tighten slightly, Kirk reconsidered his earlier remark. "I refuse to answer on the grounds that it can cause grievous injury to my body."

As both guards now regarded him in puzzlement, Kirk glanced ahead and heaved a sigh of relief as they approached their destination. A relief that was fleeting as the doors opened and he was confronted by a furious Kaleth.

"I am tired of playing with you, Captain. You will now tell me what I want to know, or you will certainly die!"

Realizing it was an empty threat, Kirk was not intimidated. "Let's not forget your dear brother Koloth. I do believe he would be most unhappy if he were not present for my demise."

Ignoring Kirk, Kaleth began to pace. "A short time ago one of our agents detected the presence of a top secret file, coded in the computers against even his ability to retrieve. The sealing of those documents must have been an order issued by you as Read of Starfleet Operations. We want to know the contents of that file, Captain."

"I don't remember anything that restricted coming across my desk, Commander. It must have occured after my... demotion."

"I doubt that, Captain. But even if that were true, your position would still require you to be kept informed of all the latest developments."

"You must think more highly of me than Starfleet, because I don't know what you're talking about."

"I think you're lying!"

"What you think won't change the facts."

"We have a way to extract that information - a very unpleasant method. You have heard of the Mindsifter, haven't you, Captain?"

"Certainly. Why else do you think Starfleet has inserted a meosite into the brain of each of its officers?"

Unwillingly Kaleth asked, "What is a meosite?"

"Seems your agent has slipped up a little. Let me see if I can remember what the pamphlets said... The meosite is a device to protect its wearer from involuntarily disclosing information while drugged or tortured. When the torturer - that's you - attempts to probe the brain of the torturee - that's me - the torturee dies. Instantly."

"You're bluffing;"

"There's an easy way to find out. But then you not only need the information to hand over to your superiors, you also need me. And you'd be taking a big chance of losing both."

Seeing Kirk's self-satisfied smile, Kaleth felt he could easily kill the

Human with his bare hands. Displaying a calm he did not feel he clenched his fists before quietly suggesting, "Captain, I will give you your life in exchange for the information."

Kirk knew he could not believe Kaleth, but it made little difference. "No!"

"You do not wish to survive?"

"I will not survive on your terms. I must survive as something."

"Then you leave me little choice. Since I dare not risk the Mindsifter, I must employ other methods of persuasion. I assure you, they will be equally painful."

⊕ >> **\*** 

Exiting Admiral Manther's office, Spock encountered Dr. MCCoy patiently waiting outside.

"Okay, Spock, now where are we going?"

"We, Doctor?"

"If you think you're going after Jim alone, forget it!"

"Why would you believe I am attempting to rescue the Captain?"

"Don't play hide-and-seek with me, Spock. I can read you like a book."

"First, Doctor, I do not understand your use of the phrase 'hide and seek'; and second, your ability to 'read me like a book' is in some doubt."

"Come on, Spock, don't try to dodge the question. What's our next step?"

Resigning himself to the inevitable, Spock explained. "Admiral Manther has given me permission to take command of the Hawk, a newly-commissioned V2j fighter, the crew of which has not yet been assigned."

"Where's the crew coming from, then?"

When Spock refused to respond, McCoy received his answer. "You aren't planning to fly that thing alone, are you?"

"Though normally requiring a crew of ten, if operated logically it is possible that it can be managed alone."

"It's also possible to feed tribbles, but it's not a 'logical' course of action. I know you consider this a suicide mission, but there are enough people on the Enterprise who think enough of James T. Kirk to man fifty fighters. This is one time you don't have to do it alone, Spock."

"Doctor, you are the one who continually advises against endangering more lives than could be saved. As you have stated, Jim is one man; how can it be more logical to risk lives for his rescue now than it was aboard the Enterprise?"

"There is a subtle difference, Spock." Hesitantly, McCoy decided the difference was hard to explain quickly, or logically. "But it's a difference I'll have to explain later, when we have more time. Right now, we better get down to the flight bay and check out the Hawk."

Spock knew an evasion when he heard one - after all, his father was an ambassador. However, he was as anxious as the doctor to find Jim Kirk, so he chose to ignore it for the present.

Rounding a corner into the flight bay, Spock and McCoy literally walked into a small group consisting of Scott, Uhura, Sulu, Chekov, Chapel, DeFalco, Shaefer and Riley. Each side warily viewed the other till Scotty finally broke the silence.

"We're ready, Mr. Spock."

Quickly restoring his shaken dignity, Spock asked, "Ready for what, Mr. Scott?"

"Tae help ye find the Captain."

"What makes you think that's our intention?"

"Thura overheard Dr. McCoy's statement on the Bridge. Besides, ye could no more leave the Captain without attempting a rescue than we could." Waving his hand to indicate the varied ships scattered throughout the bay, Scotty continued, "Which little beauty is ours?"

Feeling an exhuberence he hadn't felt since the beginning of the mission, McCoy slapped Spock on the back. "What'd I tell you, Spock? Getting a crew was the easy part - the hard part was getting the ship."

Levelling a look at McCoy that quickly sobered the doctor, Spock replied, "I'm sure the Captain would appreciate your offer. But, I cannot accept." Spock stared down the protests before they could begin. "Let me explain. I acquired the services of the Hawk by agreeing to certain terms. One is that she is to be considered a renegade. Any actions we may be forced to take would be disavowed by Starfleet."

"Hey, you didn't tell me that!"

Ignoring McCoy's interruption, Spock continued, "That also goes for her crew. No clothing or personal effects that could be related to Starfleet in any way will be permitted on board. If caught, we will not even have the vicarious protection of the Federation."

Knowing it was unnecessary to check with the others, Scotty spoke for all of them. "It makes little difference, Mr. Spock. We're still going with ye. Ach, ye can hardly run that ship with only Dr. McCoy's help. Don't make us have to disobey orders."

Realizing that the added assistance raised the odds on the possibility of Kirk's rescue, Spock acquiesced. "Your aid is accepted. However, you, Mr. Scott, Dr. Chapel, Chief DeFalco and Ensign Shaefer will remain with the Enterprise."

As the unhappy quartet protested, Spock explained. "The Enterprise is undergoing extensive repairs. Your presence, Mr. Scott, to supervise these repairs is essential, especially in the area of the warp drive engines. The same applies to Dr. Chapel.

Indignation was apparent in Shaefer's voice as she asked, "What about DeFalco and myself? We're not in command, or even second-in-command of our departments."

"Supply is a critical area, Masign. Can you honestly admit that there is someone who knows its present condition better than yourself?"

Reluctantly shaking her head, Shaefer admitted defeat. "No, sir."

"As for you, Chief DeFalco, the versatility and experience of Ms. Uhura, Mr. Sulu and Mr. Chekov precludes your participation in the rescue attempt. The Bridge must be manned by at least onemember of the command crew."

The excitement for those who would go was dulled by the obvious disappointment of those who would not. No-one was allowed to brood as Spock declared,

"We will take off in precisely one hour. Anyone who changes their mind during that period will have no action taken against them, and their doing so will remain a secret among this group. Understood?"

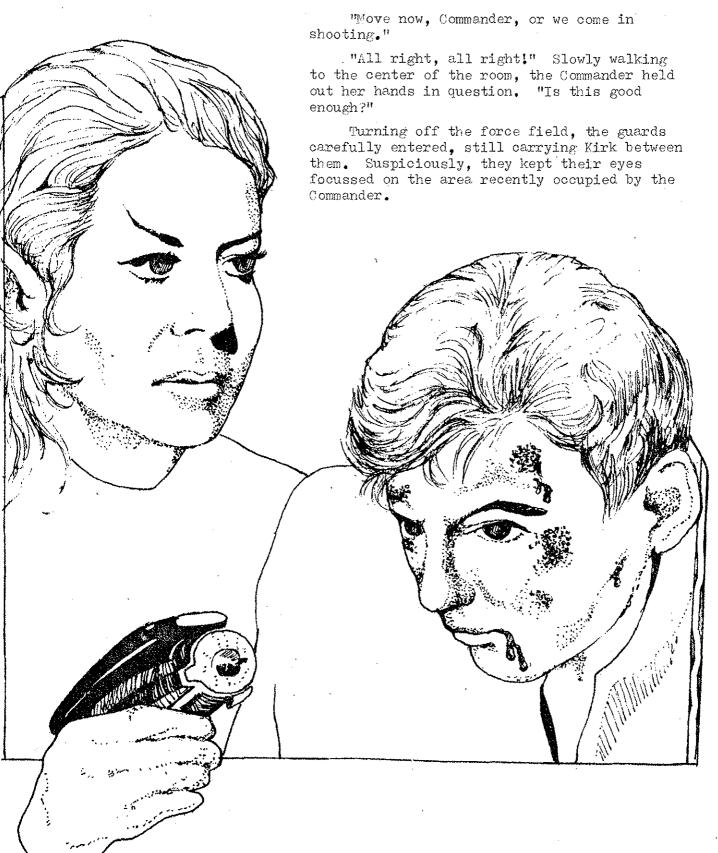
As the others nodded in agreement, Spock began to walk away. "Dismissed!"

A punishing session with Kaleth was almost more than Kirk's already abused body could tolerate. As he was carried back to his quarters, his head became too heavy to hold up, and he allowed it to drop to his chest. This position enabled him to view his legs, which to his amusement were reflexively performing

a walking motion, though his feet were far off the ground. Not realizing that he was slipping in and out of consciousness, he was amazed when they arrived at the brig so quickly.

His head snapped up as he heard the guard order, "Commander, step to the center of the room."

A voice could be heard coming from Kirk's right. "I'm comfortable right here."



The guard on Kirk's left suddenly tripped, dragging Kirk with him as he fell. Before the other guard could level his gun at the Commander he was shrouded in a blanket, its descent triggered by his partner's fall.

Though badly injured himself, Kirk took great satisfaction in knocking out his stunned guard, desperation lending him the strength required to overcome the complacent escort quickly.

The Commander, meanwhile, took care of the panicked Klingon now hidden beneath the blanket.

When it was all over a shocked Kirk sat watching the Commander digging under the blanket for the guard's disruptor. "Why didn't you warn me?"

Stopping only long enough to send Kirk a look of disgust, the Commander finally found the gun. Straightening, she tried to hide her concern as she asked, "Can you walk?"

Displaying a confidence he didn't really feel, Kirk replied, "Of course I can!"

Using her Vulcanoid strength, the Commander easily hid the guards on the bunks beneath the blankets.

Watching the Commander's actions, Kirk couldn't refrain from asking, "That blanket business was an old trick. You must be a film buff?" As a look of puzzlement greeted his statement, Kirk muttered, "Never mind." Renewing his efforts, he tried to struggle to his feet.

Turning, the Commander viewed his feeble attempts with apprehension. "Captain, I can't carry you and protect us at the same time."

"Don't worry, they worked before when I didn't need them, I'm sure they'll work now. I don't suppose you could give me a hand up, though?"

Gently raising Kirk to his feet, the Commander watched as he squared his shoulders in an attempt to control his swaying. "Captain, we must get to the docking bay if we hope to escape in a shuttle."

"That's your plan? Escaping in a shuttle?"

Indignant over Kirk's implied criticism, the Commander demanded, "You have any better ideas?"

Realizing he was out of turn in unfamiliar circumstances, Kirk grimaced. "I guess it would be a little difficult for the two of us to recapture this ship. But, how far do you think we can get before we're shot down?"

"I do know how to disable the phaser units."

"Right! Well, lead on, Commander. It's your ball game."

As a look of confusion flashed across his companion's face, an exasperated Kirk shook his head and repeated, "Never mind!"

While waiting for the others to arrive, McCoy watched as Spock made the final preparations for their journey. Before returning to the Enterprise, an envious Scotty had explained the finer points of the V2j to his friend, facts so technical they were mostly beyond the doctor's comprehension.

What he did understand had him worried. The Hawk was a relatively new style of fighter, as yet unproven in combat. She was unique for her size and style, in that she could be segmented into three sections, with each section containing full mobility and fire power.

The helm resembled a design first used on the Space Shuttle back in the 20th century, and was located on a higher level than the rest of the ship. An auxiliary control and science station were located in both the center and rear sections of the vehicle. Packing more fire power than her predecessors, she was also more manoeuverable and faster than any other ship of the line.

And... she was brand new! Which made McCoy extremely nervous. Previously, he had always tried to adhere to that old adage of letting someone else try it out first. Even the new medical equipment on the Enterprise had first been tested by Chapel. McCoy doubted whether he would set foot on the Hawk if it were for anyone but Jim Kirk.

Looking around, and remembering again what Scotty had told him, McCoy found it hard to believe that Starfleet would just give Spock this ship - or any ship - for what was in essence a personal mission. No longer able to contain his curiosity, he asked, "Spock, why did they let you have the Hawk?"

McCoy had just decided Spock wasn't going to answer when the Vulcan finally spoke.

"It is Starfleet's belief that the Captain will be forced to disclose information regarding the Organians. So, it is in the best interests of the Federation that we be successful in removing him from Klingon dominance."

"Rescue sounds better than remove, Spock." When no answer was forthcoming, McCoy suddenly realized that Spock never made mistakes in semantics. Panicking, he demanded, "You wouldn't - couldn't - kill Jim... could you?"

"Doctor, he has been under Klingon control now for over 18 hours. Time enough for them to have used the Mindsifter. It may be better for Jim if we did destroy... what's left of him."

Reality came crashing in on McCoy. Though he had been the one to tell Spock 'they weren't playing chess over there', it had taken Spock's statement to make him see the truth.

"Then why are you doing this? Why risk your life for someone who's probably aready dead?"

Spock looked up with eyes filled with pain, a silent answer to McCoy's question. What had Jim said before he left? 'Hope for a possibility, if not a probability, of rescue.' Spock was making sure that Jim had that possibility.

Silence fell between the two friends, broken only when Uhura, Sulu, Chekov and Riley entered. McCoy found himself saying a silent thank you, that they were all seasoned veterans. He wasn't sure he could stomach the excited chatter of cadets, who would only see this as an exciting new adventure, not as the dangerous and possibly deadly mission it was.

Ten minutes later all systems had been checked and they were ready to go. Straightening from his position over the helm, Spock assigned stations.

"Mr. Sulu, you and I shall work the helm. Ms. Uhura, communications in the center section. Mr. Chekov and Mr. Riley, science and auxiliary control in the third section. We shall launch in precisely eight minutes. Commander Uhura, please contact docking control and inform them of our status and launch plans."

Settling himself next to Uhura, McCoy remembered again what Scotty had said about each section being self contained. Noticing how Spock had separated them into twos, he realized that should anything happen to the forward or rear sections, Uhura would be in control of the ship.

Impatiently, McCoy waited for her to relay their clearance for launch. She had barely broken the connection when he tapped her on the shoulder. "Have you ever flown one of these things before?"

"No, but I'm quite capable of doing so, Doctor. I've been studying the manuals."

Giving a rather sickly smile McCoy said, "I sincerely hope you are a quick study, Commander!"

Uhura was unable to hide a smile of amusement at McCoy's obvious nervousness. She was intelligent enough to know that his statement should not be taken personally. He would have asked the same question of Kirk. That thought quickly

wiped the smile from her face. She had little hope that this rescue attempt would be successful, but she knew that she could not continue to serve in Starfleet if they didn't at least try.

N - 24 - 22

Determination was all that allowed Kirk to keep moving. Remembering their earlier conversation, he was intent on proving to the Romulan Commander that Humans were not defeatists. The closest he could figure at the moment, all his ribs were broken, which made it increasingly difficult to breathe, though it appeared that — thankfully — a lung had not been punctured. Additionally, Kaleth had seemed to take great pleasure in breaking every bone in his left hand; extremely painful, but not debilitating — a fact Kaleth was well aware of, since his superiors would take a dim view of his destroying their best source of information.

Letting the Commander lead the way, Firk followed in a fog. Finally she stopped in what appeared to be the engine room. Kirk found it amazing that they had made it this far without detection.

Feeling himself shoved behind a circuit board, he heard her whisper, "Don't move and keep quiet." An order he found it easy to obey.

When she returned she led him through a maze of what appeared to be secret passageways, narrower than the normal corridors; the Commander boldly walked to the shuttle bay with no fear of discovery. Anticipating Kirk's question, she smiled.

"We did not tell the Klingons everything about our ships!"

Approaching the entrance to the landing bay, the Commander motioned for silence. As they watched the teaming activity inside, she leaned towards Kirk and whispered, "This is the tricky part, trying to get to a ship without being discovered."

Kirk decided not to mention that to him the entire last twenty minutes had seemed tricky. Though he had to admit, it was better than waiting for Kaleth to break the rest of the bones in his body.

\* \* \*

Watching Sulu as they performed the last pre-flight check, Spock discovered an unknown talent. "Mr. Sulu, have you had previous experience with the V2j class fighter?"

"Yes, \*r. Spock. I was studying her before I was recalled to the Enterprise for the Vejur incident."

"It appears that you have the greater knowledge of this class, so you will act as pilot when our clearance for launch has been approved."

Overhearing their conversation, and indignant McCoy interrupted, "You mean to tell me you were going to fly this thing alone when you've never flown one before?"

"I have thoroughly studied the diagrams and expected performance manuals, Doctor."

"That's just great!"

Permission to launch forestalled the continuation of their argument. Keeping a close watch on the controls, Spock ordered, "Launch when ready, Mr. Sulu."

When they were safely clear of Starbase 12 Spock set a course that would, if they were lucky, allow them to intercept the Klingons while still in the Neutral Zone. Remembering what Kirk had taught him about the Human psyche, Spock turned to compliment Sulu.

"Very nice launch, Mr. Sulu."

Somewhat embarrassed at Spock's unaccustomed compliment, Sulu confessed.

"This is the first time I've actually flown a V2j. All my previous experience was in a simulator. I was recalled to the Enterprise before I was able to make an actual test run."

"Oh my God!"

Flashing a squelching look at McCoy, Spock quickly replied, "In that case, Mr. Sulu, your efforts are even more commendable."

Speaking sotto voce, a nervous McCoy asked, "Is it too late to transfer?"

As Uhura unsuccessfully attempted to stifle her laughter, Spock turned and glared at an unrepentant McCoy. Holding his hands up in defence, McCoy whined, "I was only asking."

"Dr. McCoy, please restrict further comments to pertinent matters. If you need something to occupy your mind, you can adjust the medical computer to the frequency that corresponds with the transponder you inserted in Captain Kirk's arm."

"I can what?"

"Commander Uhura, please instruct the doctor in the rudimentary requirements of the medical computer."

"I know how to run a computer, Spock!"

"Then please do so."

Looking at Spock, McCoy could see that he wanted to finish his statement with, 'and shut up', but his Vulcan decorum wouldn't allow such a release. As he settled himself in front of the medical computer, McCoy felt both gratified and frustrated. Gratified, because he'd finally gotten Spock's goat; but frustrated, because for once he wasn't trying.

\* \* \*

Attempting to stretch his cramped legs, Kirk wondered how much longer they were going to wait. So far, their escape had not been detected, but that couldn't last much longer. As soon as Kaleth found out, they wouldn't be able to get near a shuttle.

"If you're waiting for that bay to be completely empty before we make our attempt, we'll be here till Vulcan freezes over."

"Captain, what would you estimate our chances are of reaching that shuttle alive?"

"It's better than sitting here waiting for them to find us."

"I am in command here! We go when I say."

About to argue, Kirk reconsidered. As Spock would say, it was only logical to defer to the person who could save your life. Smiling at the idea, the smile quickly vanished as Kirk remembered that Spock was no more. Suddenly, escape no longer seemed necessary. After all, what would he be escaping to, but a world without Spock, McCoy, or the Enterprise.

Mentally shaking himself, Kirk turned to the Commander with a new determination. "What about a diversion? Is there something we can do to get them out of there?"

Thoughtfully, the Commander answered, "There is something I can do, but in your condition it could kill you. Am I correct in assuming you have broken ribson

"You are. But if you have found a way to get at least one of us out of here, do it. Somebody has to live long enough to see that the Klingons are stopped."

Nodding reluctant agreement, she said, "Stay here - I'll be right back." Slipping though the door into the shuttle bay, the Commander kept close to

the wall as she made her way to a storage locker. Clancing around to make sure she had not been observed, she quickly returned with what appeared to be two wrist communicators. Handing one to Kirk she ordered, "Put this on."

Suspiciously, Kirk fingered the device. "What is it?"

Sarcastically the Commander answered, "Don't worry - we're allies, remember." As Kirk nodded agreement and slowly slipped it on his wrist she explained, "It's an oxygen bracelet. I'm going to cross a few circuits to open the bay doors, which will automatically cut off the oxygen supply to this area. When those doors start to open, run as fast as you can for the shuttle. Understand?"

Thoughtfully, Kirk considered the plan. "Well, it's not exactly a great idea..." An exasperated look from the Commander made him finish, "... but it's a good idea."

"Are all Humans so contrary?"

"About 99%; that's what makes us almost impossible to conquer. An enemy may be able to capture our machines, but never our spirits."

Realizing she would never understand Humans - or at least this particular Human - the Commander prepared to re-enter the bay area. Gripping her arm lightly, Kirk stopped her.

"If I don't make it, don't wait for me. Do you understand, Commander?"

"It would be illogical to do so, Captain. And as I have said before, Romulans are a logical people."

"Good luck, Commander."

As she made her way to the control circuits the Commander got a brief impression that Kirk was saying goodbye, not good luck. An impression that worried her; for she found the resentment brought on by his (and Spock's) previous actions was quickly disappearing, to be replaced by respect and understanding. An understanding of why this man was held in such high esteem among his own people, and a respect for his perseverance and forbearance. Though he was in obvious pain, from injuries she could only guess at, he had not asked for any special help.

A noise to her right suddenly reminded her of her mission. Stealthily, she rounded a corner to avoid contact with an approaching Klingon. Finally reaching her destination, she started to give a sigh of relief, till she realized that this journey was far easier than the next one threatened to be. Working quickly, she repeated what she had done in the engine room, cutting some and crossing others. Activating her oxygen bracelet, she then crossed the last wire, opening the bay doors.

Ignoring the gasping and helpless Klingons, she raced for the nearest shuttle. Crasping the door frame with one hand, she suddenly felt the oxygen-deprived atmosphere of space pull her feet out from under her. Looking back, she saw Kirk had a tenuous hold on a steel girder. Using her Vulcanoid strength, she managed to pull herself inside. Regaining her feet, she ran to the storage locker.

Kirk had realized while listening to the Commander's plan that his chances of reaching the shuttle were slim to none. The distance he had to cover was twice that of the Commander, a fact he chose to keep to himself. Also, he had discovered that the short rest had allowed his legs to stiffen up, so that any progress he could make would be painful and slow.

When it finally came time to race to the shuttle, the most he could manage was a shuffling walk. Grabbing a steel girder to regain his balance, he suddenly felt his feet pulled out from beneath him. Taking a firmer hold, he realized that for him time had run out. As he watched the Commander pull . herself to safety inside the shuttle, he breathed a sigh of relief and disappointment. As he had hoped, she at least might live long enough to get the information back to the proper authorities. Personally, however, he didn't feel ready to die.

Expecting the shuttle to blast off any second, Kirk raised his head in suspicion when the Commander suddenly appeared with a power gun aimed directly at him. Deciding he did not have the courage to witness death coming at him in slow motion, he closed his eyes. When it seemed he had waited long enough with nothing happening, he opened his eyes to find a line floating in front of him, and a somewhat agitated Romulan Commander gesturing angrily. Carefully grabbing the lifeline, Kirk watched helplessly as the Commander struggled to pull him inside.

Finally succeeding, she hastily closed the shuttle doors and installed Kirk in a nearby seat. Barely taking time to secure her own position, she activated the controls for launch.

Setting a course to the nearest Romulan outpost, she pushed the shuttle to its limit. Stabilized, she turned angrily on Kirk. "What's the idea of closing your eyes? You picked a heck of a time to decide to take a nap!"

Embarrassed, Kirk knew he dared not explain the real reason behind his 'nap', so he decided to try blustering his way out of the tight situation. "Well, I wasn't exactly expecting to be rescued. If you will remember correctly, I specifically ordered you not to."

"I don't take orders from you, Captain!"

Glancing out of the window, Kirk asked, "Would you take a suggestion, then? Get the hell out of here! Kaleth does not appear to want to let us escape him so easily."

"Do not worry. I disabled his phasers - there is nothing he can do."

"Nothing, huh? Do you know what being rammed means? I hope so, because that's what's about to happen."

Frantically, the Commander began working the controls, hoping to carry the shuttle beyond the Bird of Prey's limits. But the Romulan shuttle, like the standard Federation shuttle, was never designed for manoeuverability. A number of times the ship was shaken by glancing blows, each one causing immeasurable damage.

Spotting a planet, Kirk ordered, "Head for that planet - it's our only hope. Kaleth won't be able to follow us into the atmosphere without risking his ship."

"But what if the planet's not hospitable?"

"We really haven't got much to lose. We already know space is very inhospitable, and Kaleth is little better. If you can think of any more options, I'm willing to listen."

"You'd better pray we have enough controls left to land this thing."

"Lady, it's a miracle to me that we've gotten this far."

An excited Russian expletive interrupted McCoy's attempts to decipher the Hawk's medical computer. "Mr. Spock, sensors have detected what appears to be the Rom-Klingon vessel."

"Bearing, Mr. Chekov

"Bearing, 357 mark 12. It's at extreme sensor range, Mr. Spock, but its movements appear to be very erratic."

"Continue to keep a close monitor, Mr. Chekov, and keep me posted. Commander Uhura, have you detected any transmissions?"

"No, sir; she appears to be maintaining a communications blackout. They haven't even got a circuit open for incoming messages."

"Mr. Chekov, are there any planetary bodies in the vicinity?"

"Yes, sir. Bearing 386.9."

Determinedly, Spock ordered, "Mr. Sulu, bring us in from behind that planet. Let's see if we can't approach the vicinity undetected."

Looking up from his monitors, McCoy inquired, "What's with all the secregy, Spock?"

"Our sudden appearance could precipitate the Captain's demise. Also, Doctor, there is little doubt that we will be forced into combat, where either the Klingons or ourselves will be destroyed."

Shaking his head in confusion, McCoy could only mutter, "I thought that was the general idea?"

"If possible, the Federation would like us to bring back proof of the Klingon conspiracy. It is the opinion of many that the Romulans will hesitate in taking our word against the Klingons."

"Proof! Are you trying to tell me we're supposed to capture that..."
Indicating the Romulan Bird of Prey, McCoy finished, spreading his hands wide and glancing round their small ship, "... in this?"

"Precisely!"

"Why didn't you say this was a suicide mission?"

"I thought I did, Doctor."

"Not loud enough."

Settling himself next to the Commander, Kirk attempted to aid her in landing the disabled ship, but his unfamiliarity with the controls only added to a frustration that had been steadily growing at each new endeavor. Kaleth and his men had done well, the pain that he had been trying to ignore was becoming almost impossible to deny any longer. Even the control he had learned from Spock was no longer working. Hazily he heard the Commander yell, "Frace yourself, this is it!"

Suddenly the ship plummated towards the ground, totally out of control. Kirk caught only a quick glance of what appeared to be a very unorthodox landing field when he was violently thrown forward. Before losing consciousness he could hear the ripping and tearing of the metal around him.

As the Eawk slipped behind the safety of the planet, Chekov called, "Mr. Spock, my sensors have picked up a shuttle entering the atmosphere of the planet. She seems out of control."

Excitedly, NcCoy yelled, "Spock, I've got a reading! It's Jim!"

Turning, Spock ordered, "Mr. Sulu, place us out of sensor range, behind the planet."

Unable to contain his enthusiasm, McCoy was practically pounding on Uhura's back. "Spock, what're we waiting for? Let's go get Jim!"

"We shall wait, till the Klingons are out of range. If they believe the Captain is about to be rescued, it will become imperative that they return to destroy him and us."

Exasperated, McCoy could only mutter, "You and your damn logic!"

45 **- 25** - 25

"Captain! Captain!"

The female voice forcing itself into his consciousness somehow seemed threatening to Kirk. It was associated with pain and danger, and he did not want to listen.

Then, from far away, he heard another voice calling, a voice so familiar and so loved that its very presence was enough to inflict unbearable torture to its listener. Dr. Leonard McCoy could not be calling his name, because Dr. Leonard McCoy was dead.

"Jim! Jim, boy, wake up! I didn't take this pleasure trip just to watch you take a nap."

Even in his numbed state Kirk could hear the faint despair in McCoy's jest. He was unprepared to face what he believed could only mean that he, like his friends, was dead. No other possibility seemed viable.

"Doctor, desist in your attempts to awaken the Captain. In his present state that would be an undesirable condition. I suggest we return to the Hawk. If the Klingons should return..."

"I know, Spock; we're sitting ducks."

"I fail to understand, Doctor, how the position of water fowl has any bearing on our current status."

As soon as the laughter started deep in his chest Kirk knew he would be sorry, but he was no longer able to control it. Though causing an almost intolerable physical pain, the laughter was releasing the agonizing mental pain that he had endured since Kaleth had lied about the fate of the Enterprise.

"Jim, stop that! Do you know that you're doing to those ribs of yours?"

"If you'd really like to know, Bones, I could probably tell you in detail." Regarding McCoy's sympathetic expression, Kirk amended, "It's all right, Bones. If you only knew how good I feel just seeing you and Spock alive."

Grinning down at his friend, McCoy agreed. "I think I have a pretty good idea." A frown replaced his grin as the doctor reconsidered. "What do you mean, seeing us alive? Didn't you know we had escaped successfully?"

"No. Kaleth told me you'd been destroyed in the attempt."

"This Kaleth sounds like a real nice guy. Who is ...?"

Unusually impatient, Spock interrupted. "Doctor McCoy, can the Captain be safely moved to the  ${\tt Hawk} \, T^{n}$ 

Previously unable to do more than acknowledge Spock's presence, Kirk now looked directly into the brown eyes of his friend. The relief and joy reflected in those eyes was almost enough to break Kirk's own reserve.

Noticing the emotional turmoil revealed on his scanner, McCoy quickly broke the strained silence. "Sure, Spock. It won't be very comfortable for him, but we haven't much choice. If you take his right side, I'll take the left."

"Unnecessary, Doctor." Bending, Spock gently lifted the battered body of his friend. "You may assist the Commander."

Suddenly remembering his companion, Kirk guiltily swiveled his head till the familiar form of the Romulan Commander came into view. "Are you all right?"

"I am relatively undamaged, Captain." Pulling away slightly, the Commander continued. "And in no need of assistance."

Exasperated, McCoy groaned, "All this rejection could give a person an inferiority complex."

Despite his burden, Spock displayed all the dignity of his heritage. "I doubt there is much chance of that occuring in this case. Doctor."

Kirk smiled at the familiar exchange, but the smile quickly faded. As they crossed the short space between the two ships he looked back at the battered remnants of the shuttle. Though he had sustained further injuries, which he could ill afford, he was amazed that he was alive at all. Pieces of shuttle were scattered throughout the entire area, making the journey to the Hawk a cautious one.

When Spock entered the fighter Kirk was surprised to see a tearful Uhura, and even more shocked by the joyful greetings of Sulu, Chekov and Riley. He felt his own eyes mist as he realized the sacrifices they had made for him. It was something he had come to expect from Spock and McCoy, but for others to have risked their lives in what he knew was considered a suicide mission made him feel very humble.

Spock, in an attempt to hide his own almost overwhelming emotion, became all business. "Mr. Chekov, have you been monitoring your sensors?"

Slightly affronted, Chekov replied, "Of course, Mr. Spock. The Klingons have returned to their original course, back to the Klingon Empire."

As Spock gently lowered Kirk to a seat in the center section, the Captain grabbed the Vulcan's arm. "Spock, you've got to stop that ship. It shouldn't be too difficult, the Commander disabled their phasers. That's why they didn't fire on us when we escaped."

McCoy pessimistically suggested, "They could have repaired it by now."

Feeling insulted, the Commander replied, "I doubt it, Doctor. The Klingons received a minimum amount of instruction in maintenance. We did not trust them as much as your Captain believes."

Regretfully, Kirk regarded McCoy. "We'll have to take the chance she's right, Bones."

Not wishing to worry his Captain, Spock nevertheless found it necessary to state, "Jim, I've been ordered by Starfleet to capture the Klingon vessel if at all possible..."

Exasperated, McCoy threw up his hands. "That's just great! Here we have a ship, one-tenth the size of that monster out there. You want to capture it, Spock, and Jim wants to destroy it. You two wouldn't be interested in the vote of a sane man, would you?"

Trying to hide a smile at McCoy's outburst, Kirk answered mildly, "Sorry, Bones, command of a ship hasn't yet become a democracy."

Not finding any amusement in the exchange, the Commander turned to the one person she could understand. "Mr. Spock, why capture and not destroy?"

"Authorities in Starfleet feel they may need concrete evidence to prove to your superiors the duplicity of the Klingon conspiracy."

Restless at the delay, Kirk rejoined, "Well, they'll have their proof when you return with the Commander."

Spock reluctantly suggested, "If she and you are believed, Captain."

Looking down at his aching and broken body, Kirk replied, "If they think I'd do this to myself, they need help." Earnestly he continued, "Spock, we must destroy them, one way or another. If the Klingons are allowed to inspect that ship, at their leisure, it'll set the Romulan technological advantages back years."

As she watched Spock nod in agreement the Commander tried to hide her unease as she asked, "Captain, there might still be some of my crew on that ship. What about them?"

"You don't really believe that, Commander. And even if there were, the lives that will be saved on both sides is worth the sacrifice."

With narrowed eyes the Commander regarded the man before her. "Would you feel the same if that were your crew"

Solemnly, Kirk viewed the woman who had saved his life. "I don't know, but I hope I'd have the courage."

Gruffly, McCoy broke the ensuing silence. "Well, whatever we're going to do, let's do it. Jim needs more help than I can give him in this plaything you call a ship."

Gently, Kirk suggested, "Let's go find the Klingons, Mr. Spock."

Turning to follow Sulu, Spock was stopped by a curious Commander. Indicating Kirk, who was presently being fussed over by McCoy, she asked, "Has he always been like this?"

"Except for about two years."

"How has he lived this long?"

Overhearing the Commander's question, McCoy replied, "He has a guardian angel, who works overtime."

Confused, the Commander looked enquiringly at Spock, whose only reaction was a slight lifting of an eyebrow.

Suddenly remembering other encounters with the Klingons, McCoy turned to Kirk. "Don't take this question the wrong way, Jim, but why didn't Kaleth use the Mindsifter on you?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I'm not even sure they had one on board, though Kaleth said they did."

"Then how did you avoid it?"

"I bluffed!"

"You what?"

"I told them I had a meosite in my brain. If they used the Mindsifter, it would kill me. Kaleth didn't seem willing to find out if I was lying or not."

Spock regarded his Captain in indignant wonder. "Captain, your propensity for telling falsehoods is becoming somewhat alarming."

Smiling in delight, McCoy added, "What he means is, you're becoming the biggest liar in Starfleet, Jim."

"Was I just insulted?"

"You know Spock better than I do. You tell me."

Deciding the best thing to do was ignore both men, Spock returned to his station. As Sulu checked their instruments for takeroff, Spock called, "Mr. Chekov, do you still have a fix on the Klingon vessel?"

"No, sir - only the direction she was heading."

"I think it's safe to say we should find them in that general direction. Very good, Mr. Chekov. Whenever you're ready, Mr. Sulu, you may proceed."

Turning to his patient, McCoy suggested, "Hang on, Jim; when this thing blasts off - it blasts off!"

As if to give validity to McCoy's statement, Kirk suddenly felt himself flattened against the back of his seat. Noticing a quick, worried glance from Sulu, Kirk felt McCoy's statement might have offended the usually effusive helmsman. "Mr. Sulu, that was very smooth. I had not realized you were so proficient with the V2j fighter."

Smiling proudly, Sulu admitted, "This is the first time. I've really gotten to fly her, sir. All my previous training was in simulation."

Sending a squelching look at McCoy, Kirk unknowingly echoed his Science Officer. "Then your performance is to be commended."

Relaxing, Sulu discovered that the special feeling he had missed was back. Though a good commander, Spock was unable to instill that extra confidence that took a good man and made him great. In fact, Sulu doubted whether there was another man in the universe who could expect the results Kirk did - and get them.

Coming upon the Romulan Bird of Prey, Kirk turned to Communications. "Commander, open a channel. Let's see if Kaleth would like to surrender."

Astonished, McCoy looked at his friend. "You've got to be kidding!"

"Bones, I can't destroy all those people without giving them a chance."

Seeing the pain, both mental and physical, in Jim's face, the doctor refrained from making any further comments. As each minute passed, McCoy became more annoyed at the suffering his friend was forced to endure. Why Kirk had not passed out long ago was a mystery he could not fathom.

Uhura's excited voice interrupted McCoy's musing. "Captain, I've contacted Commander Kaleth."

Taking a deep breath and attempting to square his shoulders, Kirk ordered, "Let's hear what he has to say."

As the familiar gruff voice filled the small ship, Kirk could not repress a shudder. "Captain Kirk. I am surprised, but delighted, that you are giving me another chance to destroy you."

"You talk very big, Kaleth - for someone who has no fire power. You are to surrender your ship and follow us to the nearest Starbase."

"You are foolish indeed, Captain, to believe I would surrender to a ship I could practically squash with my bare hands."

"Do not force me to destroy you, Kaleth."

"Ha, we will see who destroys whom, Kirk."

Abruptly the transmission ended. Frantically, Uhura tried to regain contact. Finally she admitted defeat. "I'm sorry, sir. There's no answer on any frequency."

"It's all right, Ulmra. Kaleth has made his decision."

Chekov's anxious voice intruded. "Captain, she's trying to ram us!"

Hurriedly Kirk ordered, "Evasive action, Mr. Sulu."

Quickly Spock, Uhura and Riley manned the defensive stations. With fire power forward, mid-ship and aft, Sulu was easily able to out-manoeuvre the larger ship and still keep the guns to bear on their opponent.

Regretfully, Spock turned to his Captain. "It appears Kaleth has made his decision. We must destroy them before they destroy us."

Closing his eyes, it appeared that Kirk was not going to answer, when he finally agreed. "It is so ordered, Mr. Spock."

Puzzled, the Commander regarded her recent ally. "How can you feel remorse at his death, after what he has done to you? If a Romulan were in command of this ship. Kaleth would not be receiving such considerations."

Quietly, McCoy answered, "If almost any other person besides Jim or Spock were in command, he would not be receiving these considerations. It's something special these men have in abundance. Some think it makes them weak. I believe it gives them unbounded strength. It's what we call compassion."

With his eyes tightly closed, Kirk could feel the reactions of the ship as first Spock, then Riley and Uhura fired their phaser guns. Though he hated Kaleth for what the Klingon had done to him, he found it difficult to hate the other faceless men who served on the doomed ship. Recalling how many had died already - the Klingons, the Romulans, and the scientists on Outpost Zero, Kirk once again wondered why innocent people always had to suffer for the greed of a few individuals.

As the shuddering stopped, Kirk knew it was finally over. They could now return and assist in the negotiations between the Romulan Empire and the Federation. A new treaty would undoubtedly be signed, securing the ideals of both and making the absence of the Organians less epochal, and quickly foreshadowing this incident and the people who had suffered and died. They would be relegated into

the background, forgotten except by a very few.

Opening his eyes, Kirk saw the worried glances of his friends. Sighing, he ordered, "Take us home, Mr. Sulu. We still have a lot of work to do."



## THE VULCAN PALACE

They're changing guard at the Vulcan Palace - Tiberius J. went down with Janice.

Janice was eyeing one of the guard.

"A Vulcan's life is terrible hard,"

Says Janice.

They're changing guard at the Vulcan Palace - Tiberius J. went down with Janice.
They've great big sehlats inside the grounds. "I wouldn't live there for a hundred pounds,"
Says Janice.

They're changing guard at the Vulcan Palace Tiberius J. went down with Janice.
We saw a guard in a sentry box.
"He's got a haircut just like Spock's,"
Says Janice.

They're changing guard at the Vulcan Palace - Tiberius J. went down with Janice.

We saw T'Pau on a litter so high.

"She did look grand as she swept by,"

Says Janice.

They're changing guard at the Vulcan Palace - Tiberius J. went down with Janice. We looked for Sarek, but he didn't come. "He's probably helping Spock with a sum,"

Says Janice.

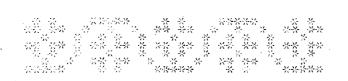
They're changing guard at the Vulcan Palace Tiberius J. went down with Janice.
We wanted to see Spock, but we didn't dare ring,
"Because the door might be answered by that T'Pring,"
Says Janice.

They're changing guard at the Vulcan Palace - Tiberius J. went down with Janice.

A face looked out but it wasn't the guard,
"He was killed as we crossed the yard,"

Says Janice.

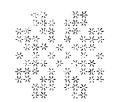
Barbara Wright (+ 2 lines from A. D-P.)



## SIDE BY SIDE



## Maria Rebicsek



Captain Kirk was tired. Everyone on the USS Enterprise needed shore leave, especially Kirk, who needed both rest and time to get over the previous few days. Their last mission had been arduous, but it was the end that had drained him, for they had arrived at the Guardian of Forever planet, and the events that had occurred had affected Kirk more deeply than anyone else.

Kirk was in his cabin, trying desperately hard to go to sleep. He knew he needed rest, but the memory of Edith Keeler's tragic death continued to haunt him. Knowing he <u>must</u> rest, or he would soon be unfit for command, Kirk considered going to McCoy for some pills, but changed his mind, deciding that he must come to terms with his loss by himself. Swinging off the bed, he went and sat down by his desk.

"Maybe if I get some of this overdue paperwork done, I'll soon feel drowsy."

About an hour later there was a buzz at his door. "Who is it?"

"Spock here, Captain."

"Come in."

Spock entered and mentally frowned when he saw Kirk's haggard face. "Jim," he said softly, "you must get some rest."

"Yes, I know, but it's so difficult. I'm okay during the day, but the nights are the worst."

"Shall we have a game of chess?"

"Yes - perhaps it'll help me to relax."

One and a half hours later, Kirk began to get sleepy. Spock's quiet calm was taking effect.

"Captain, it is getting very late. Perhaps we could resume this game tomorrow?"

"Yes, I think that would be a good idea." Firk did not want to admit that he was sleepy and could not concentrate properly. "I think we had better both go to bed."

Spock left Kirk's cabin, but did not return to his own. Instead he went to the viewing platform on the Observation Deck, where he could meditate and be alone with the stars. When he arrived, however, he found that he was not alone. Dr. McCoy turned round, saw that it was Spock who had arrived, but said nothing. Spock came and stood next to him.

"I have just been playing chess with the Captain. He is finding it very difficult to sleep. If he does not rest soon, he may become unfit for command."

"I wish I could help Jim, but he'd resent it if I of all people tried to help. Don't forget, I'm the cause of his heartache. If only I'd put that cord-razine away promptly..."

"Doctor McCoy, how many times have I told you that it was not your fault?"
"Ten times, at least," McCoy said gloomily.

"Unfortunately, we cannot foresee what will happen next, and that incident was due to random factors not operating in our favour."

"In other words, it's just bloody bad luck!"

"Isn't that just what I said? However, would it be possible for you to give the Captain something to help him relax before we arrive at Starbase 20? Or he: will need more than R & R by then."

"Don't tell me you're worried about Jim?"

"I do not wish for the Captain to become unfit for command. His morale and well-being are always reflected in the crew."

"Aw, c'mon. I know you're just as worried about Jim as I am. Besides, as I said, I'm the cause of his distress, and I think he'd resent it if I interfered."

The First Officer remained silent, and McCoy knew that Spock agreed with him. Both gazed at the stars and withdrew into their thoughts. Soon afterwards, McCoy went to his quarters.

Spock, deep in meditation, did not hear him leave. He was trying to think of ways in which he could help his Captain. Their friendship in the last few weeks had developed much deeper than either of them realised. Kirk found the quiet presence of his First Officer soothing, while Spock was beginning to realise that with Kirk around it was getting harder to control his Human half. After much thought he decided that it could not be against Vulcan teachings to feel warmth and friendship for this man, but he must never show it. It would also be wrong to reject Kirk's friendship, since Kirk so obviously filled an emptiness in him.

计 经 法

The Enterprise continued on her course. To reach Starbase 20 from their sector they had to pass through an area of uncharted space, and Starfleet Command sent a message through ordering them to explore that sector before arriving at the Starbase.

The sensors revealed a Class M planet in one of the systems ahead that Kirk decided to investigate. It was not long before they established orbit around the planet. Mr. Spock was rapidly carrying out a preliminary investigation with the ship's canners, but there was some interference from the surface. A complete investigation could not be made with the sensors, and Kirk decided to beam down.

The survey team assembled in the transporter room. The Captain had decided that he would like a breath of fresh air, and accompanied Mr. Spock, Ensign Foster, a biologist, Lt. Evans, a geologist, and two Security guards - while sensors had not revealed the presence of any intelligent life forms anywhere on the planet, Kirk was not taking any chances. The intitial scan found a breathable atmosphere and a gravity 1.12 that of Earth.

The party beamed down, and Spock began his survey immediately, using his tricorder to record his data. The other members of the party, except Kirk, also set to work. The Security guards kept an eye on them and their surroundings, to ensure their safety from any danger. Kirk decided that he would look around.

"Spock, I'm gonna take a look around. I'd like to see what the view of the surface is like from that outcrop over there. There's no need for me to take any of the Security guards with me - I'm not going far."

Before Spock could voice any objections, his Captain was out of earshot. Kirk felt a sense of relief. Much though he appreciated his First Officer's company, it was a relief to be alone for a short time. He suddenly realised that this was the first time he'd actually been on his own since Edith's death. He wandered off slowly, deep in his thoughts.

Twenty point two minutes later Spock straightened up from his work and looked around for the Captain. His eyes came to rest on a solitary figure standing motionless on an outcrop of rocks against the mountain. Feeling a momentary pang, which he quickly suppressed, he wished he could help his Captain to forget the past events with a mind-link, but he knew that Kirk would never give permission. Kirk felt that he should come to terms with it all by himself, and to perform a meld without permission would constitute a grave breach of privacy.

Spock continued to watch Kirk. He saw Kirk turn round, but as he did so a snake crawled into the Captain's path and hissed at him. Kirk, deep in his

thoughts, didn't notice the gold and brown reptile. The tricorder showed it to be poisonous, and throwing Vulcan caution to the winds, Spock shouted, "Jim - look out!"

Startled out of his reverie, Kirk looked up as the snake bit him. Losing his footing, he slithered then fell, head over heels, and came to rest at the bottom. Spock and the Security guards ran forward, Spock regretting that there had not been enough time for him to use his phaser. But it was useless to remonstrate with himself. He found Kirk lying at an awkward angle, checked that he was breathing and had a pulse, then contacted the Enterprise.

"Spock to Enterprise ... "

Before he could say any more, Scotty answered. Obviously Uhura had been ready for any transmission.

"This is Mr. Scott here. Is everything all right down there?"

"Megative, Mr. Scott. Get me Sickbay - I require Dr. McCoy down here immediately. Captain Kirk has been seriously injured in a fall."

McCoy, on hearing the message, grabbed his medikit, ran to the transporter room, and immediately beamed down. Without a word he rushed over to Kirk, and scanned his injuries. Then, flipping open his communicator, he requested that Nurse Chapel beam down with a trolley. That done, he turned to Spock.

"The Captain has sustained a fractured spine, a fractured hip, and several cracked ribs. I need to get him to Sickbay as soon as possible - his breathing is not too good."

Chapel arrived with the trolley. McCoy gave the Security guards careful instructions, and working together they all gently lifted the Captain onto it without causing any movement to jerk his spine. McCoy also gave him a painkiller and a sedative, and then beamed up.

Soon afterwards the others had finished their tasks and returned aboard. The planet was suitable for colonisation; the colonists would soon get used to the heavier gravity, as long as they remembered that if they fell they would land a lot harder - hence the reason for Kirk's severe injuries.

Spock immediately made his way to Sickbay, only to be told that the Captain was still in surgery, and that McCoy was operating. He returned to his quarters to wait.

Several hours later, his intercom beeped. It was Murse Chapel, telling him that the Captain was now coming out of surgery and would be in Sickbay's Intensive Care Unit. The Vulcan left his quarters and made his way there.

On entering, Spock went to his Captain's bedside. He looked down on the dead-white face then, with his mask firmly in place, he faced McCoy. The doctor was not deceived - he knew that the more distressed Spock was, the more Vulcan he appeared.

"Report." Spock knew he sounded curt, but he was exercising a great deal of control.

"Spock, I must tell you this. He doesn't have much of a chance. He has a badly fractured spine, and one of the broken ribs has pierced his right lung. The poison from the bite doesn't help. It isn't lethal in a healthy person, but in Jim's weakened state it lessens his chances of survival. There's one factor in his favour. The poison doesn't affect the nervous system, so there won't be any paralysis, but it does reduce his ability to fight against his other injuries. In addition, the events of the last few weeks have taken their toll on him. If he was fully fit, he'd have a good chance. But now... we'll just have to hope for the best. I've done all I can. Right now he's deeply unconscious, almost comatose, and he needs large doses of painkillers and sedatives, otherwise his heart won't stand the strain."

Spock nodded, then spoke. "Would I be an obstruction if I remained here?"

"No - in fact, you may be of help. Your presence here has helped Jim pull through other crises."

Spock brought a chair up close to the bed, and began what was to be a long vigil.

The hours slipped away through the night. Soon the ship's artificial dawn would begin. Day also slipped past. Kirk still lived, but there was no change. Spock hardly left his side.

Two days later, McCoy joined Spock in his watch. "Dammit, he should have come round by now! It's almost as if he doesn't want to live. It seems that he hasn't come to terms with Edith's death, and doesn't want to face life. Spock, you've got to meld with him."

"No, Dr. McCoy, I cannot. Melding without permission breaks one of the most stringent of Vulcan's laws. I cannot."

The alarm sounded. Kirk had stopped breathing, and McCoy ran for his hypo. A nurse put an oxygen mask on Kirk and began artificial respiration. McCoy administered a powerful stimulant - cordrazine - and then stepped back to watch the indicators. When he was satisfied that Kirk was breathing again, although with help, he turned to Spock.

"Spock, you must. It's now or never."

Spock nodded agreement. He hoped that if he were successful, Kirk would forgive this invasion. Leaning over Kirk, he placed his fingers at the temples.

//My mind to your mind. My thoughts to your thoughts.//

Spock walked in a vast darkness. He could see nothing, feel nothing. Was Kirk already lost to them. He carried on walking in the darkness. He called out, //Jimi//, but there was no reply. Not a murmur of sound broke the thick, dark silence. Spock walked on until he saw a spot of light; it filled him with renewed hope, and he hurried on. Had Kirk retreated deeply into his mind, not wanting to return? However, Spock would do his utmost to bring him back.

The light became brighter. Spock felt that he was in a tunnel, and it would be long before he reached the light source. An un-nameless time later, he came out into green pastures. Kirk sat by a stream, idly watching the river flow by.

//Jim!// Spock called out.

Kirk jumped. He turned and faced Spock. //I know why you are here. To take me back. I won't go. Edith's waiting for me on the other side of the river. I have all the time in the world. When I've worked out how to cross the river, I'll be with Edith, and we will always be free.//

Spock knew that he must not let Kirk cross the river. The river of death. Beyond it there would be no return. Spock looked down into the murky waters, imagining the nameless horrors lurking there.

//Jim, you must come back with me. The ship needs you.//

//No. For once I'll do what  $\underline{I}$  want. I want to remain here.//

//Please, Jim. Please come back. I need you. If you must remain, then let me come with you.//

 $/\!/\!\,\mathrm{Mo'}/\!/\,$  An anguished cry came from Kirk's lips. Spock placed his hand on the Captain's shoulder.

//Please. If you have ever cared for me, if we are truly friends, then please come with me now.// Spock was so close to the edge of the stream that he paled.

Back in Sickbay McCoy wiped the pouring sweat from the Vulcan's rigid face and watched anxiously. If nothing happened soon he would be forced to break the meld, since Spock was getting paler and paler.

//Jim:// A voice called from the other side of the stream. //Spock is right, you know. Your place is by his side; as I said before, it always was, and always will be.//

Kirk faced Edith. She continued to speak. //I understand. You were not responsible for my death. It was part of my destiny, and you did what you had to do. Go with Spock. One day there will be a place for us, together. I will be waiting.//

//Goodbye, Mdith. I understand, and I accept.// It was the hardest thing for him to turn away to Spock. //C'mon. Let's go home.//

It seemed only a moment before they both reached the surface of Kirk's mind. Before breaking the meld, Kirk placed his hand on Spock's shoulder. Wordlessly, they pledged their friendship.

Spock broke the meld. He felt slightly disorientated as he looked round Sickbay. The Captain certainly had a powerful mind.

Kirk was coming round. McCoy watched them both carefully. There was no need for him to ask if they had been successful or not - it was obvious.

"Bones, I feel lousy. What the dickens have I busted this time?"

McCoy filled him in with all the details, and then ordered Spock off to his quarters.

· 公 · 公 · 公

The days passed. Kirk continued to get better in leaps and bounds, and Spock, as usual, came to visit him in his spare time.

"Captain, we will be arriving at Starbase 20 in two days, and..."

"I intend to enjoy my shore leave, you know. I most certainly don't want to remain in Sickbay.  $^{\circ}$ 

McCoy grinned. "Okay, then. But only if you take someone reliable with you. How about Mr. Spock? I know Vulcans don't need shore leave, but you, Jim, need a chaperone to keep you out of trouble!"

For some time McCoy had known that Kirk had forgotten his resentment, and he knew he could tease his Captain all he liked.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, looking at their expressions of astonishment, "I, for one, will have a great shore leave - especially after playing nursemaid to the Captain and the First Officer!"

There wasn't any answer, so McCoy continued, "Well, wad'ya know - I think I'm finally gonna have the last word..."

MEN DE THE THEFT WAS SERVE WASSE

Children of Marth, what do you see?
A bright hopeful future, or rotten, like some diseased tree? Show us, fabled destiny, show us the way to bring your new promise from the seeds of today.

Lorraine Goodison

